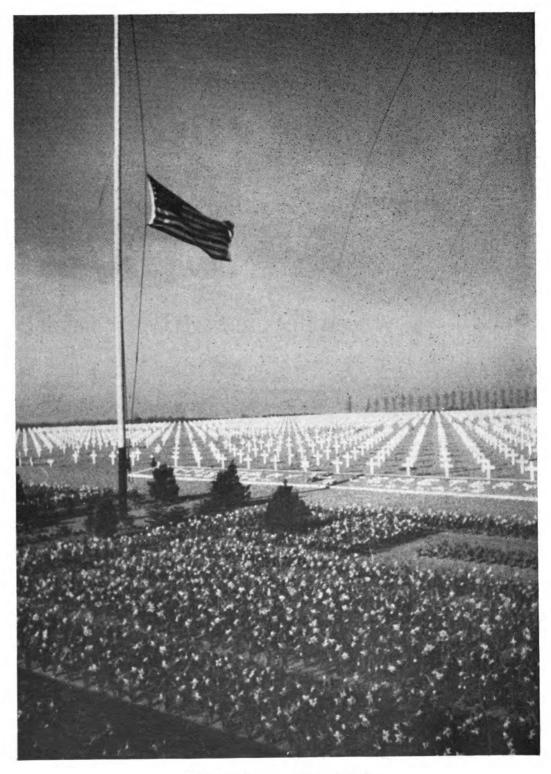




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CROSSES IN THE WIND





"They kept the faith."

# CROSSES IN THE WIND

BY

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### DEDICATION

To Mrs. Edward H. Jordan and all others whose loved ones have given their lives for the freedom of mankind.





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#### PREFACE

The 611th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company, of which I was commanding officer for twenty-one months, was only one of many similar graves registration units that had the colossal task of caring for hundreds of thousands of American dead in World War II. The magnitude of this work was tremendous. Our unit alone helped to bury more than 21,000 dead in the short period of eighteen months in the European Theatre of Operations. Other units, like the 607th Graves Registration Company, buried many more.

Even with our superior air, ground, and naval power, this war cost our nation a staggering sum of 291,895 human lives. Army casualties alone were far greater than the combined losses of the Union and Confederate forces in the Civil War. Enemy forces suffered even more heavily than the Allies. All told, this was by far the most costly struggle that the world has ever seen.

I do not desire to reopen recent wounds by subjecting the next of kin to the horrors of war. This has already been done too well; the wounds will not close easily. The loss of a loved one can never be forgotten. The sight of the blind, the crippled, the diseased can never be hidden from our eyes. The dead are lying throughout the world — Guadalcanal, North Africa, Italy, France, Holland, Iwo Jima. Though their souls have departed, their remains still are held by the soil and waters of the earth. Our government is now faced with the tremendous



task of finding a final resting place for our war dead. The wishes of the next of kin, wherever possible, will be met.

Many people have said that the American public does not want to read any more war books, that the question of what to do with the dead concerns only the next of kin. However, I feel that the public does want to know about this little-publicized aspect of the war: graves registration service, the burial of our casualties, the location of temporary cemeteries and their care, the facts about final burial either in America or overseas. Where the dead shall rest is, of course, important. But it is not of final significance — these men are dead. How much more important should be our determination to make the world a better place to live in.

Even now, the dark war clouds which have hung over the world for six years appear to be no less ominous. There is a feeling of uncertainty, a feeling of apprehension. Can it be that this great sacrifice of human life was made in vain? Can it be that the causes, the principles, for which our men fought and died were false, and that one war merely sowed the seeds of another world catastrophe?

War is hell on earth — the dead are a silent testimonial. Let us, the living, "give our last full measure of devotion" by remembering that peace can come only through unselfishness and cooperation. Let us keep faith in our great heritage, in the democratic principles for which we have fought. Above all, let us determine to cultivate, to cherish, to preserve the ideals of world brotherhood.

J. J. S.



#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am indebted to the War Department and to the Netherlands Government for their assistance in the preparation of this book.

I am further grateful to the following people for their aid and inspiration: Rev. Pierre Heynen; Mr. and Mrs. J. E. E. Ronckers; Joseph van Laar; Mathias Kemp; The Most Reverend William R. Arnold, former Army Chief of Chaplains; Lieutenant General William H. Simpson; Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley; the late General George S. Patton, Jr.; Major General T. B. Larkin, The Quartermaster General; Mr. William M. Hines, Sr., Chief of the Technical Information Branch, Office of the Quartermaster General; and Mr. Herbert L. Schon of the same office.



#### FOREWORD

After visiting a number of the World War II cemeteries in France, Belgium, and Holland, I came to the headquarters of the American Graves Registration Command at Versailles. The commanding officer asked me what I thought of the condition of the cemeteries I had seen. "Perfect!" I answered, for I had never thought that in so short a time after the war I would see such beautifully arranged memorials to our war dead. "It would be a comfort to the mothers, fathers, and wives of the men buried here to see these cemeteries," I continued. "The people back home should hear more of the work of the American Graves Registration Command."

The next of kin of our war dead, the country over, are hungry for whatever bit of information they can obtain about the graves of their loved ones, and the care with which these graves are tended. Moreover, they want to learn something of the circumstances that led to the death of the soldiers beneath those white crosses. They want to know if anyone is taking an interest in that grave which is so far away from them — yet so near to their hearts.

The memories that the people back home have of the men who died are of their last furloughs, or of some happy event that occurred before the war years. The time they spent with the Army, Navy, or the Marine Corps overseas is an unfamiliar chapter to the families who saw sons, husbands, fathers go away—



never to return. Yet they want to come closer to the soldier who fought on the battlefront; closer to that grave marked by a white cross.

Major Shomon has brought the crosses closer to us with his account of the decisive battles of the war that led to victory and to the rows upon rows of crosses in the wind. His inspired ambition to make the cemetery at Margraten, which he and his 611th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company established, a lasting tribute to the men who died in battle, is typical of the feeling I found overseas by all of the personnel in the American Graves Registration Command — from private to commanding officer. Theirs is not and was not a routine job. They have made it a work of respect for their dead comrades, and of understanding for the feelings of the people back home. Summed up in the words of a sergeant I met working at the Margraten cemetery, "But for the grace of God we'd be lying out there now. There's not much we can do, but at least we can keep the cemeteries over here the way the folks back home would want them."

Those men who were assigned to the task of burying the dead; those charged with the identification of bodies; those who sorted out the personal effects to be sent back home to the next of kin, will not very easily forget the sacrifice made by the men who lost their lives in the service. Neither will the next of kin forget that there is an emptiness in their homes now that will never again be filled.

How long will the rest of the world remember?

On Memorial Day, 1946, I saw the grave of my husband. His grave was covered with flowers brought there by the Dutch burgomaster and his wife from Margraten. It was good to see that someone was remembering him. Fresh flowers — iris, roses,



wild poppies from nearby fields — were strewn on every one of the graves, placed there by the good people of the province of Limburg, Holland. They came from miles around to pay tribute to the Americans and Allies buried in Margraten. It was their expression of gratitude to America and to the world for the liberation of their country.

Through such thoughtfulness, the grave of your son or husband buried overseas becomes more than "just another white cross." Instead, some Dutch family, some French or Belgium girl or boy, is honoring your loved one with flowers and a prayer. They are taking a personal interest in the soldier who is buried in their holy soil — just as you would be doing if that particular grave and cross was near you, near enough so that you could visit it yourself.

I am told that, in the years to come, many of the bodies now buried overseas will be returned to this country for final burial. Others will be taken from the present 209 cemeteries the world over and will be reinterred in eight memorial parks overseas. The decision as to where a son's or husband's final resting place should be is a decision left to the next of kin. To many, it will be a comfort to have that grave near enough to visit it regularly. To others, it would be too great an emotional strain to have the bodies come to this country for reburial. The first consideration of our Government is to do whatever will bring the family the greatest degree of consolation. The decision on the part of the next of kin will be easier to make after more of the details of the repatriation program, and the work of the Graves Registration Command, are made known.

MRS. EDWARD H. JORDAN

President and Founder

Gold Star Wives of World War II.



Soldier, rest! thy warfare o'er,

Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking;

Dream of battled fields no more,

Days of danger, nights of waking.

In our isle's enchanted hall,

Hands unseen thy couch are strewing,

Fairy strains of music fall,

Every sense in slumber dewing.

Soldier, rest! thy warfare o'er,

Dream of fighting fields no more;

Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking,

Morn of toil, nor night of waking.

-SIR WALTER SCOTT.



# THE 611TH QUARTERMASTER GRAVES REGISTRATION COMPANY

#### Margraten

Near the tiny village of Margraten, Limburg Province, South Holland, stretches the vast expanse of Margraten U. S. Military Cemetery. It was the Ninth U. S. Army's cemetery during World War II, established by the 611th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company.

Approximately fifty acres of graves and crosses silently echo the fury of war. This is today (1947) the largest, and perhaps the most beautiful, resting place of some 21,000 dead.

The soil of Margraten is holy. Rich is the grass that covers these heroic dead: Americans, English, French, Czechs, Poles, Russians, other Allies, and Germans. The enemy dead are in a separate field, apart as in life, in a section with fewer footprints and flowers.

The American flag, high on a straight white spruce pole, flies gloriously in the Dutch wind. Its reverent, half-mast days are gone.

This is Margraten today. The future of Margraten is obscure; its very existence rests in the hands of the American people, the next of kin who decide the future of this cemetery as well as that of more than two hundred others located throughout the world.

Margraten of yesterday has a strange and unparalleled



history. It is a history of war, death, tears, and flowers. It is a history atypical of many cemeteries, yet typical of others the world over. It, too, began in the hands of the American people, the American soldiers.

#### Fort Francis E. Warren, Wyoming

Late in 1943, the 611th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company came into being at Fort Francis E. Warren, near Cheyenne, Wyoming. I was named commanding officer, and was given five second lieutenants. These young officers, Donovan, Guymon, Schreiber, Williams, and Zajicek, came from the Quartermaster Officer Candidate School, Camp Lee, Virginia. They were fine officers and excellent men. All but one of them remained with me until the end of hostilities in August, 1945, in Calas, southern France.

At this time, I was a first lieutenant, with some previous graves registration training with other units in Washington and Oregon. Every graves registration company called for one civil engineer; I was a trained forester with an engineering background, and liked the idea of surveying new land, locating plots, and planning landscape architecture.

I received eight trained soldiers as cadre with which to start training my new unit. There was a first sergeant, supply sergeant, mess sergeant, four platoon sergeants, and one unit clerk. The company carried an enlisted strength of one hundred and twenty-four men; twelve of these men were Quartermaster Corps non-commissioned officers with a medical specialty number, whose principal task would be to identify bodies at either graves registration collecting points or at cemeteries.



We were a most fortunate company. We received a good share of excellent men — men with a fine educational background. We had only two men who were morticians in civilian life. We started training early and got through basic by early January, 1944. We trained hard. Promotions in the company came rapidly — nearly half of the unit were to have ratings of technician fifth grade or higher.

For our technical training, we convoyed to Denver, Colorado, and witnessed autopsies at the Denver General Hospital. We simulated caring for the dead up and down the hills of Fort Warren. We maneuvered on nearby Pole Mountain, executing day and night tactical programs. One night we even set the plains on fire accidentally, and nearly burned up several buildings. As our last technical effort, we erected a one-hundred-grave model cemetery, complete with crosses, fictitious names, and open graves.

We kept a clean record and took many awards and commendations. When we got ready to leave Fort Warren, the Commanding General of Fort Warren Unit Training Center, Brigadier General Whittaker, said:

"It is desired to commend you and your organization for the superior showing you have made in your training. Your organization is the first in the history of this Training Center which has achieved three ratings of 'Excellent' for complete inspections by the Status and Inspection Division of this Headquarters.

"The above accomplishment indicated an outstanding state of training, a thorough knowledge of duties by your officers and non-commissioned officers, an interest in their duties by all concerned, and by direct implication indicates a high state of



morale and the exhibition of superior qualities of leadership by yourself. This state of affairs is not only pleasing to this Headquarters, but is undoubtedly a justifiable source of pride to each man in your organization.

"A Copy of this commendation will be placed in your 201 file and in that of each of your junior officers."

We left Fort Warren in early May and went to Camp Edwards, Massachusetts. There we stayed one week, getting our last things in order, and preparing for embarkation. We left Camp Edwards on a Friday and went straight to the Boston Port of Embarkation.

#### The S. S. John Erickson

Our ship was the converted Swedish ship Kungsholm, a sister ship to the Gripsholm, and now named the S. S. John Erickson. She was a big vessel and carried nearly 6000 troops. We boarded the ship at noon, eating coffee and doughnuts given to us by the American Red Cross.

We pulled out of Boston early the next morning. When it became daylight, we were far at sea, in full view of thirty other vessels. The next day we were happy to see forty more ships in our convoy.

The voyage to Liverpool took fourteen days. During that time, we had the usual scares — submarine attacks in the mid-Atlantic; we saw sea weed, gulls, porpoises, fish, and one airplane near the British Isles.

When we landed at Liverpool, we wondered if the invasion had already begun. We were hoping that it hadn't; we wanted to be in on the great show.



#### Maiden Newton

When we marched off the Erickson, we were heavily overloaded with equipment. Our first sergeant got tired and fainted under the weight of two heavy duffle bags and had to be assisted to the train.

The English transportation system, crude as it was, proved to be very efficient; our train was on time and we pulled out of the station on the exact minute. Everything was timed in England. We could feel a great tenseness . . . a big invasion was certainly in the making.

We moved south to the lower coast of England; our destination was Maiden Newton. We were hoping that Newton would have beer, girls, and other interesting diversion. As it turned out, Newton had nothing but combat engineer troops waiting for the assault on Normandy.

When we arrived at Newton station, we still had some miles to go to our area in Rampisham, in northern Dorset. We were escorted to an old church house and dumped on the ground with the words, "root, hog, or die." Although it was May, the weather was cold and damp.

#### Rampisham, England

Well, the 611th was not to be dismayed. We set up house-keeping. First, Brennan, my mess sergeant, got us some food; then we put up some tents and made ourselves comfortable. We started to dig latrines, but were soon politely told that this was England and we would have to use "honey buckets." We couldn't figure out what these buckets were for until we began using them; then we still wanted to dig our own latrines.

My headquarters was a woodshed. I didn't like it. Even



Acme Photo

American troops and equipment in England await invasion sailing orders.

a pup tent was better. However, it wasn't long before I had a fine English home for an office with plenty of space; my men found it for me.

All the officers lived in an old stone house. It was damp and frightfully cold. We made a fire, but it wasn't long before we were smoked out. Evidently the English people did not want us to have a fire and had stuffed the chimney. They could have been polite and told us, but they didn't bother. Lieutenant Williams and I slept downstairs in the same room; the other officers slept upstairs. There wasn't much choice—all the rooms were stuffy and cold. We used candles and canned heat to take away the chill. At night we pulled the blinds down and talked in the candlelight, listening to the airplanes that came over, headed for the Channel. Sometimes it took them two hours to pass overhead. This was an ominous sign . . . we knew the invasion was not far off.

#### D Minus 1

On June 5, 1944, the woods around us were wet and dripping. Our new equipment was getting wet in spite of all we could do, which greatly hampered our training. My men stationed at Southampton, Weymouth, and Plymouth were soaked too, although they had better billets. They were wet from the salt air of the invasion ports.

Lower England, from Southampton to Plymouth, was teeming with troops. They were embarking on LST's, troopships and other vessels. We saw part of the invasion armada move out of Weymouth harbor, truly a sight to behold. The barrage balloons hung over the ships like so many toy playthings.

The coast of England seemed to be sinking under the



weight of ammunition, tanks, guns, warehouses, food, gasoline, oil, rolling stock, tank retrievers, bull dozers, mines, powder, and trucks. There were more trucks than the human eye could count. Most of them were perfectly hidden in the woods along English lanes; others, thousands of them, began moving toward the invasion ports.

Weymouth harbor was deserted. All the ships were at sea. The roads were jammed with masses of men and vehicles — all moving now, moving to the ports; they were waiting for the first assault vessels to return and pick them up. We were waiting too. We waited for the dead from the beaches of Normandy.

In low tones, everybody was talking about the weather ... the Channel was dark with low hanging clouds. General Eisenhower's cross channel operation, known as Operation OVERLORD, was under way. On June 4, near Portsmouth, he had already postponed the operation for twenty-four hours because of bad weather. Now the ships were at sea. They could not turn back. The air fleets were waiting. Everything was going as scheduled, but twenty-four hours late. OVERLORD was taking place.

Somewhere near Falaise, a German general was preparing for bed in his quarters outside the 21st Panzer Division Head-quarters. The 21st Panzer was a superbly equipped German Armored Division. It was waiting for orders. This was Hitler's pride and joy — Hitler bred, Hitler trained. It could hurl the invader back into the sea.

At 11:35 P. M., June 5, 1944\*, the German general was in



<sup>\*</sup>The ensuing situation has been corroborated by members of the German High Command.

bed, lying between sheets of fine French linen. His room was warm and comfortable. Guards were thick around the building and seemed more agitated than usual. It was very dark and the general closed his eyes, hoping for early sleep. Then, suddenly, a knock at the door broke the silence of his room. He jerked, reared up, and listened.

"General . . . are you awake, Sir! May I see you! It is important!"

"Was ist los? Of course I am awake . . . come in!"

"General . . . our Signal Officer reports that there are mighty movements in the Channel. From the radar it looks like the entire coast of England is descending upon us! Ships, General, thousands of ships!"

"Mein lieber Gott! Der Tag!" exclaimed the astonished general. "Get me Marshal Rommel — immediately!"

Soon the wires across Europe were buzzing with the news. Rommel's reply was brief. "Ja... der Tag! Proceed with Plan B until we know the exact landings. Get the 352nd Division ready. See you tomorrow."

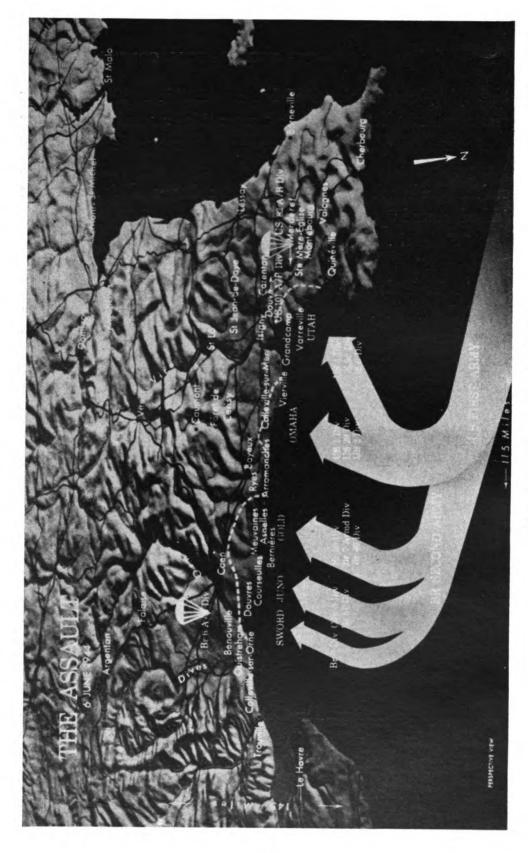
Rommel was not afraid. He had chased Montgomery all the way to Egypt with little equipment. He wasn't afraid of him now, nor of General Eisenhower. He turned to his aide.

"Call my staff, Colonel. Tell them to assemble here at once."

The officer flipped a "Heil Hitler" and left the room. Marshal Rommel got up, adjusted his monocle, grabbed his swagger stick, and waited. Thoughtfully he puffed a huge smoke ring into the center of the room.

Then the officers came in. Each turned to Rommel and saluted. They were in full uniform and had a military smart-





ness found only in the best Prussian officers. They gathered around Rommel quietly and waited for their leader to speak.

"Gentlemen . . . you well know that the hour for Germany has come. General Eisenhower is sending his vast armada against the coast of France tonight. We think that he is sending five complete divisions in his American force — the 1st Infantry, 4th Infantry, 29th Infantry, the 82nd Airborne, and the 101st Airborne. Montgomery is sending others. There are 4,000 ships, over 11,000 aircraft; there is also an island full of armor, ammunition, and men."

Rommel paused . . . then he continued.

"This force will land and try to make a beachhead. That is its strategic aim. It must not remain on the continent for more than nine hours. The Fuehrer has said, gentlemen, that this force must not stay more than *neun Stunden*.

"We have fourteen divisions of men; we have a hundred submarines and flotillas of 'E' torpedo boats in the bay. We have aircraft, and above all . . . the secret weapons. We have the Fortress Europa. It must not be taken.

"Airborne troops will land before dawn in Normandy or Brittany. They must be wiped out. We expect landings in Calais, Brest, and perhaps in the south.

"Gentlemen . . . Germany has waited for this hour. The weather is in our favor. And remember, we have the 21st Panzer. Heil Hitler! Deutchland über Alles!"

## Operation Overlord

At 2:30 A. M., June 6, 1944, American paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division descended on Ste. Mère Eglise, in upper Normandy. The American 101st Airborne Division



dropped near Carentan. The British 6th Airborne landed near Caen. The German 21st Panzer was poised near Falaise, northwest of Le Mans, in Normandy. It began moving around 2:30 A. M. At 3:14, 1000 British heavy bombers began hammering the coast of Normandy. The German Division was moving toward Caen. Allied naval bombardment of the coast started at 5:50.

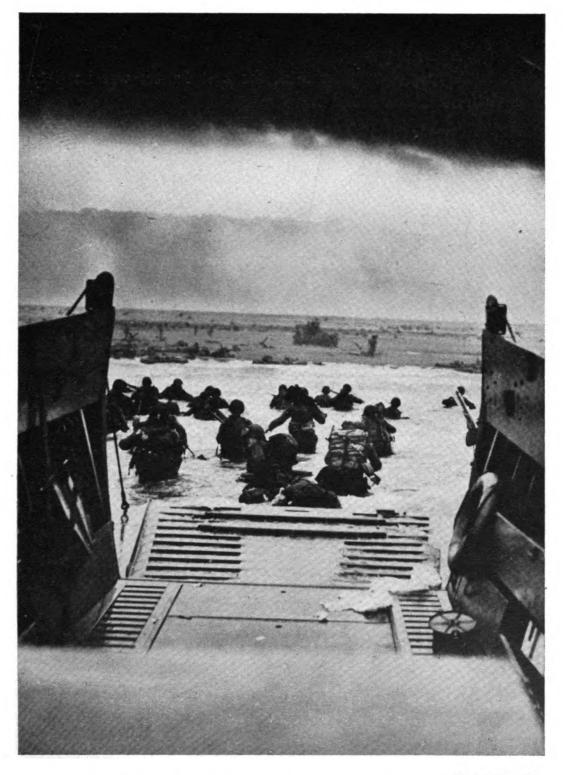
On D-day morning, Lieutenant General Omar Bradley began landing his American forces on the northern coast of France. Infantry and engineer assault troops hit the beaches at 6:30... H-hour was 7:30. This was Tuesday, June 6, 1944.

The British and Canadians landed several divisions near Bayeux and Caen; their destination was the Orne River. Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery directed the landing assault, and General H. D. G. Crerar and Lieutenant General Sir Miles Dempsey directed the British and Canadian ground troops.

By 8:00, Operation OVERLORD was well under way. The terrible 21st Panzer Division was stopped in its tracks between Falaise and Caen. American and Allied war planes spotted the Division and showered it with thousands of powerful bombs. This grand division, the pride of Nazi generals, was the finest Germany had to offer. It carried the best armor and the best men; it stretched for miles in the early Norman daylight. This was the division meant to destroy the invading Allies.

The Commanding General of the 21st Panzer became a battered, helpless, maniacal Nazi. He was driven to madness. His proud force was ripped apart. His men were crippled, crazed and bewildered, dying and dead. Gone was his invincibility, his faith in his Division, in himself, and in Hitler. His heart and his hope were smothered into the dirt and dust around





GI's landing in France from a Coast Guard landing barge, on June 6, 1944.



him. In four days, June 6-10, the 21st Panzer was horribly beaten. The Allies had flown more than 11,000 planes, completing some 32,000 sorties, and had dropped over 27,000 tons of bombs.

#### Marshaling Yards, England

On D-day, the 611th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company was waiting at the invasion ports of Southampton, Weymouth, and Plymouth. We waited for the dead. We had seen GR troops pull out with the assault troops. We knew there would be many dead on returning LST's and other ships, being brought to England for burial.

In the late afternoon, the first dead began arriving at our collecting points near Weymouth harbor. My men were assisting the 605th GR Company at several of the invasion ports. The bodies were pink and blue, marking the initial stage of decomposition. They did not smell bad, and the men did not mind working on them in the least.

At each of our collecting points we had a mountain of English caskets, made of wood, mostly veneer, and lined with silk. We had prepared for an emergency. We expected a powerful air assault on all the English invasion ports, and had made every arrangement for just such an eventuality. Fortunately, the Germans did not use their aircraft to any extent in England, once OVERLORD was underway. They were much too busy in Normandy.

Burial in England was formal. We shipped the bodies to two U. S. military cemeteries, one located at Brookwood near London, the other near Cambridge. Funeral services were



colorful and appropriate, similar to burial in the United States.

Our British caskets were light and easy to handle; they were more than substantial for our newly arrived dead from France. Actually, some of the men felt strange, using caskets for the unembalmed, wet, and frequently blood-soaked corpses from the beaches of Normandy.

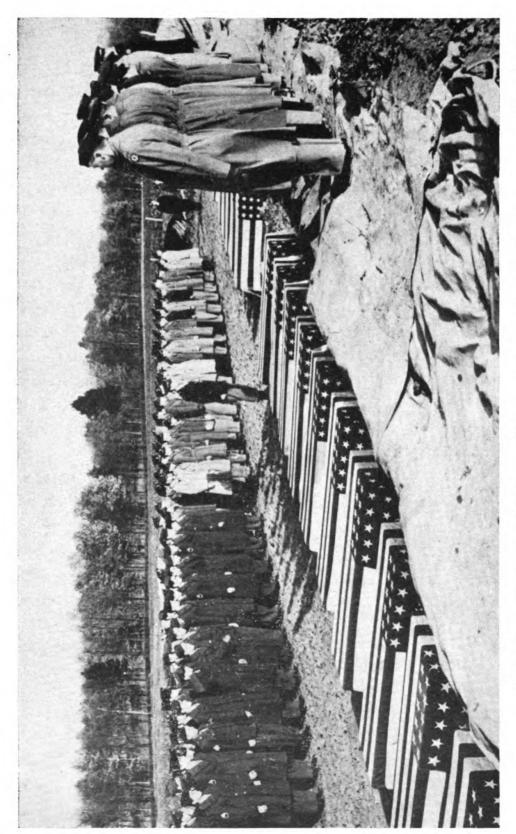
Much as we would have liked to, the number of dead we received made it impossible for us to give any one body any special attention. The pockets of the dead had to be cut open with sharp knives to locate the personal effects. The whole operation had to be done with utmost efficiency and care. Identification of the body was the most important thing; locating and safeguarding all personal effects came next. When the bodies arrived, they were quickly identified, marked, and placed into caskets. Trucks took the caskets, with all necessary papers, to the nearest cemetery.

In France, this complicated routine was completely revised, and a more efficient plan put into effect. Caskets could not be used, and mattress covers were employed as shrouds in their stead. Burial was either temporary on the field of battle, the grave marked by a simple cross or helmet, or the body was taken to the nearest established U. S. military cemetery for a more formal burial. Wherever possible, the latter system prevailed. It was this type of burial that my unit was trained for and was soon to do on the continent.

Most of the dead that we received at the invasion ports on D-day and thereafter were from ships and other craft that received direct hits near the Normandy beaches. When the dead were on ships or were found floating in the water, crews picked them up and carried them back to England. The casualties in







Burial services at a U.S. military cemetery in England.

France were buried just off the beaches in regulation cemeteries. Two of my former companies, the 606th and the 607th Graves Registration Companies, were in operation as soon as the beaches became clear enough to permit burial.

Many of the paratroopers buried their own dead at Blosville. This burial ground later became a U. S. military cemetery; it was a fine site, level and screened from troops.

In Normandy, the dead were picked up by the thousands. La Cambe U. S. Military Cemetery was one of the first to be established. Then came Ste. Mère Eglise Nos. 1 and 2. The 82nd Airborne troopers suffered heavily in their descent near Ste. Mère Eglise. Germans had put twenty-foot poles in all fields where airborne troops might land, to wreck all possible gliders. The 101st Airborne Division also suffered heavily in their drop near Carentan.

The German dead were taken to the U. S. cemetery at Orglandes. Here unknowns ran high. Most of the Germans carried only numbers and an identification tag similar to our own. Frequently, bodies had no identification whatsoever, and were fingerprinted and buried as unknowns, with an X number.

Our own dead were identified easily if the identification tag was present or if the soldier carried a Soldier's Pay Book. Where positive identification was questionable, fingerprints, toothcharts and other information were obtained, and the body assigned an X number. Later, most of these X cases were positively identified. Allied dead were handled in a similar manner. In all cases, graves registration troops spared no effort to establish identity, regardless of race, creed, or color. The care for all bodies was the same, given with the reverence, respect, and honor which all soldier dead rightfully earned.



### The Second Battle of London

On D plus 8, Hitler launched his Second Battle of London. I happened to be in the city at the time, and wondered, along with everyone else, just what was happening. Sirens began screaming about 9:30 P. M. People scurried in and out of air raid shelters; others took to the subways. Big anti-aircraft guns boomed all night long. In Hyde Park, love-making GI's were annoyed; so were the people in Piccadilly Circus. Prostitutes were angry, their business being seriously curtailed. Sailors and soldiers ambled along the streets and warned the people to duck from falling shrapnel. It was a strange night. We kept hearing planes — peculiar aircraft. Every once in a while something would drop in the city and light up the horizon. Then followed a powerful explosion. Windows were cracked and some blown out into the streets.

Next morning, the British Secretary, Mr. Morrison, announced that London was being raided by a secret weapon—the robot bomb. People began talking of robots, doodle bugs, fire bugs, June bugs, and buzz bombs.

The robot, or V-1, did a great deal of damage. It crashed into many congested areas in London, killing thousands of people and making many more thousands homeless. The Thames River docks were heavily hit, as were many huge warehouses in south London.

The V-1 was a small but dangerous jet-propelled plane, and carried a powerful warhead. It was fascinating to watch in flight, especially at night, when the stream of fire could be seen escaping from its rear exhaust. The robot flew at an altitude of between one thousand and four thousand feet, and kept on

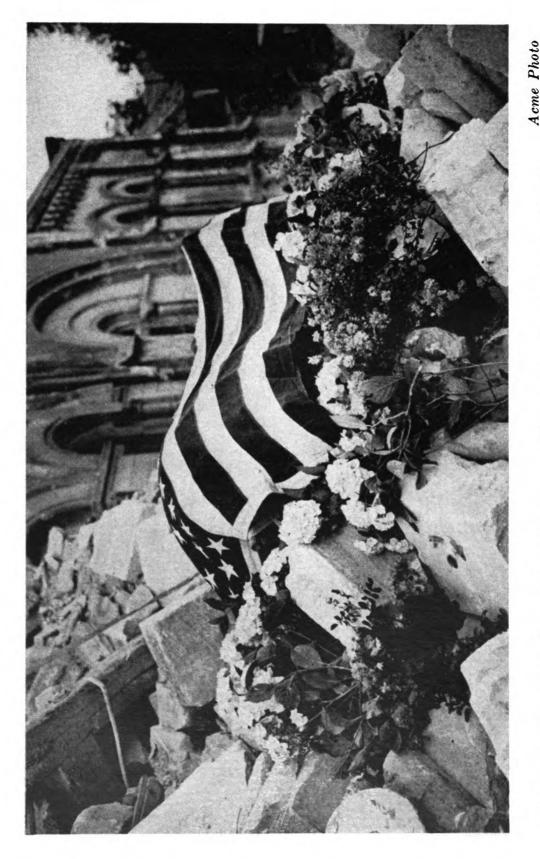


an even keel. When its power faded, it veered earthward sharply, and almost always exploded with a terrible concussion. People ran everywhere, trying to evade the shrapnel or falling debris, but usually this proved of little avail. If the bomb exploded close by, damage to life and property was heavy. If farther away, the concussion shook the ground and buildings like an earthquake. In flight, the V-1 sounded like an outboard motor and could be heard for many miles. When it passed overhead, it shook everything in its path; windows and doors rattled in the buildings below.

My men stationed at Southampton were more than once driven from their tents by falling V-1's. Other coastal cities in England, too, received their share of attacks in the Second Battle of London. Later, after occupation by the Allied troops, Belgium was heavily hit. Many thousands of V-1's were dropped right into the heart of Liège. Destruction was great. By repeated bombing, the Germans kept the Allies from using the port of Antwerp for a long time. This was an important city, and received more than its share of the V-1. It wasn't pleasant.

Toward the end of June, the Allies had a million men in France, and a beach 80 miles long. The battle of the hedgerows was nearing an end. Cherbourg had fallen to the U. S. VII Corps under General Collins. The U. S. 4th, 9th, and 79th Infantry Divisions made the attack. It was a big prize, but a costly one. During the first few weeks of fighting in Normandy, June 6-20, Allied casualties numbered 40,549; about three-fifths of these were Americans. General Marshall reveals that of this number, 3,082 Americans were killed; 13,121 wounded; and 7,959 missing.





The body of an American officer lying among the ruins of a church in St. Lô. Killed while leading his troops on the outskirts of the town, his last wish was fulfilled by his men, who brought his body with them as they fought to drive the Germans from the area.

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# The Fall of Caen and Breakthrough at St. Lô

The British Second Army under Dempsey tried twice to break out of Normandy. They tried to turn Rommel's right flank, but were repulsed by repeated armored attacks by the Germans. Rommel was using elements of the German Seventh Army and the Fifteenth Army. Caen finally fell to the British, despite twenty-four counterattacks by Marshal Rommel in late June.

Following the fall of Cherbourg and Caen, the Allies prepared to break out of the Cotentin Peninsula. The American VIII and XIX Corps started to drive toward St. Lô. The V Corps captured Hill 192 on July 11, 1944, and opened the road from Bayeux to St. Lô. The 29th Infantry Division fought desperately for St. Lô for two bloody weeks and finally captured the city. It was completely wrecked and no longer could serve the enemy as a rail junction.

On June 25, the great assault on the German Seventh Army had begun. This offensive unhinged the entire western flank of the German line and made way for the break out of Normandy. During one of these attacks by our Air Force, Lieutenant General Leslie J. McNair was killed when he went too far forward to watch the operation. Some bombs that had fallen short of their mark killed the general and many of our front line troops.

The fury of the Allied offensive in Normandy tore the Germans apart. Rommel was presumably wounded and was soon to lose his command. The German Seventh and Fifteenth Armies careened in disorder and began to gradually withdraw from Normandy. When the Allied offensive cleared, the Nazis were in full retreat — falling back on the Seine, toward Paris,



Belgium, Holland, and Germany. Some have said, and rightly so, that this was the turning point in the war in Western Europe.

## Taunton, England

Back in England, our mission at the invasion ports was rapidly drawing to a close. We had little to do; our station at Rampisham had only a small headquarters detachment. We were ready to move into France. Taunton, England, was our first stop, where we had to secure further equipment for our mission on the continent.

We were a disgruntled unit in Taunton. The men were required to work in a depot where rations and other quarter-master supplies were being prepared for shipment to France. Food was bad, ill prepared, and limited; quarters were adequate but not comfortable. The men griped a lot and wished for the day when we would get orders to move to France.

One day an unfortunate incident occurred. One of the men helped himself to a can of jam; he had a supply of bread in his barracks and wanted to eat a late snack at night. My second platoon commander, a lieutenant, witnessed the affair but kept quiet. However, the British "limeys" saw the whole thing and reported it to the depot commander.

I soon had my hands full in the colonel's office. I apologized and promised to make restitution. This, however, did not satisfy the colonel, and he threatened to punish the young lieutenant. The minor affair took on more and more magnitude; I was summoned, with my officer, before a board of officers and asked to explain the whole thing. I pleaded frantically for the man — I needed him badly in the unit.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I realize that this is no mere incident; I realize that the honor of the service and that of its officers



must not be jeopardized. But I know this officer well; he is respected and liked by his men. It would be a grave error to punish him for something he felt was not altogether wrong. He simply turned his eyes when it happened. The soldier wanted the jam for himself and the men in his barracks. Food has not been good; it is poorly prepared at the mess hall and is always cold. You can investigate these charges yourselves. I beg of you, gentlemen, permit me to handle this matter under the 104th Article of War. I will see that restitution is made. As for my officer — kindly consider a reprimand and not a General Court Martial."

Well, Zeke, the lieutenant, got out of it lightly; he was fined and given a suspended sentence. After that, the comradeship in our company was even more pronounced.

When we left Taunton, I am sure the colonel was glad; I can truthfully say that every man in my company was equally happy. We were leaving England as service troops for the continent, to perform our all-important task — caring for our dead comrades in Europe.

Our journey to Southampton was by motor convoy and rail. The unit was broken into two serials. I took charge of the advance motor detachment, and Williams, the third platoon commander, was in charge of the foot troops. When my group reached Southampton, we were herded aboard an old English freighter. We had C rations to eat, while Williams and his detachment on another vessel had fish and beans — and a shipload of exciting nurses. Ours was just an old, heaving, fire-scarred boat, but it sailed boldly out into the Channel and crossed the water to France in less than eight hours. It was a pleasant trip, although less exciting than we had imagined.



#### FREEDOM FOR FRANCE

### Omaha Beach

Here we waited twenty hours for debarkation. Finally, some DUCKS came along shipside and began to take the troops to the beaches. Our vehicles had been unloaded the previous night and were already waiting for us in Area B. When we touched French soil it was a strange feeling. More than 1,000,000 men had already piled ashore on this same beach. We climbed into our remaining jeeps and took off for our area. The hedgerow country was heavily covered with dust. Everywhere was evidence of fighting . . . the trees were torn, the roads full of holes, and there were numerous fox holes and slit trenches.

In Area B, not far from the beach, the motor convoy reassembled. There was no sign of our other detachment, but we really didn't expect them until the next day. No one told us where to go; we were confused and bewildered. Finally, we received orders to proceed to another area. We convoyed out of Area B and made for a sector farther up in Normandy. When we arrived, Williams, with the rear detachment, was waiting for us. The 611th was reunited once more.

Late that evening, we were summoned from our holes and ordered to move to still another area! We moved in blackout and made our way to St. Clement. It was difficult; the drivers



were inexperienced and our convoy hit all the holes in the Insigny highway.

We spent just one day at St. Clement. While there, we experienced our first air raid and were thrilled at the spectacle. Next day, we had orders to move to Bricquebec, west of Montebourg, in upper Normandy.

Here we received our first taste of sweet cider. We bivouacked in an orchard and had lots of apples to eat. Some of the men bought wine, cognac, and calvadose, which little French girls brought to us in small lard buckets. We also bought eggs, tomatoes, and French bread. Before leaving England, we had received the usual 200 new francs, as well as sea sickness pills, vomit bags, a French language booklet, and a Red Cross package of candy, gum, and cookies.

It wasn't long before we knew that our little booklet would have to be studied. One of the first things we learned was: Quel est le chemin pour aller a . . . ? This expression was a great help when we came to a cross road and wanted directions, or when we met a pretty girl and wanted to show off our French.

Another phrase all the men learned referred to sleeping with a French girl: Voulez-vous coucher avec moi ce soir, Mademoiselle? This favorite of the American GI was soon well known all over France. The men often used it as a joke; but frequently the girls would take it seriously and retort with either a slap in the face or a fond Oui! Oui!

At first, the American soldier was greatly admired by French women, who were unaccustomed to being treated as equals. This new state of affairs was enthusiastically welcomed by girls all over France and Belgium. Unfortunately, the soldiers later took advantage of the situation.



## The Breakthrough

On August 1, we became a unit in General Patton's Third Army. Our status was obscure — I later discovered we were on a loan basis. St. Lô was over, the breakthrough was made and now it was to be exploited by Patton. We felt the man's genius all around us; everyone did. It was one of those strange feelings known only to a soldier.

Around 3:30 A. M. on August 2, we were aroused from sleep by a lean, tired Quartermaster colonel. He directed the company to move at once. This move was going to be long, daring and dangerous; it would require my best, my most courageous drivers.

These drivers were quickly assembled in the dark, and given instructions as to the route of travel and the needed convoy discipline. The Colonel would take the lead, followed by me, the headquarters vehicles, and then the platoons. In all, there would be eighteen Quartermaster vehicles in our convoy — five jeeps, twelve three-quarter-ton trucks, and one two-and-a-half-ton truck.

Seventeen minutes later, we pulled out of the dark Bricquebec orchard. We twisted toward Montebourg and Valognes along a road that was unfamiliar, rough, and full of huge holes. We moved slowly. The tired men dozed, but one man kept watch from the rear of each vehicle with a loaded carbine. I could not take my eyes away from the Colonel's jeep, which kept disappearing and reappearing ahead of us. I was tense, nervous, worried. This was our first real convoy in the dark, and it was none too safe. Germans were still hiding in the by-passed woods; enemy planes circled occasionally overhead; the boom of artillery could be heard from the direction of



Avranches; it was pitch dark and lightning flashes from the big guns lit up the horizon.

We passed Ste. Mère Eglise and could smell the cemetery. Troops were working at night, unloading bodies. The odor was faint but familiar — the same odor we knew at Weymouth, Plymouth, and Southampton.

Soon we passed Blosville, where graves registration troops were sleeping. They lived in gliders which had been wrecked by the Germans when the 82nd Airborne descended there. These monsters looked ghastly in the pale light from the cemetery. The crosses were visible — thousands of them. A friend of mine was buried there, a graves registration man I knew back in the States. Blosville also reminded me of TIGER, one of the early practice operations for OVERLORD, in which I lost one of my best friends in the 607th Graves Registration Company. The poor guy got it, along with hundreds of others, when a German E-boat attacked them in the Channel.

There were more cemeteries — La Cambe, Orglandes, and several others. Then we came to Carentan. Here, huge sheets hung from the windows, and French flags waved in the hot, early morning breeze. Dogs barked as we roared through the charred city; its torn, battered walls looked as if they might fall on us at any moment.

We hit Périers about daybreak. The light was better now, and we could see the aftermath of war. It was frightful. Down in the valley ahead was St. Lô, a big rail center, now in smoldering ruins. The 29th Infantry Division made a shambles of the city. Its 30,000 people had vanished or were dead. Rats took their places, and chattered from the rubble and masonry; even for them there was nothing to eat.



In the south end of town, some German dead were still unburied. We saw feet sticking out from beneath heaps of rubble; a steady stream of flies swarmed in and out of the ruins. Then we saw a bloated body, a German; he was green and full of gas. Some of the men wanted to stop and examine it, but we had to hurry on.

When we neared Coutances, it was broad daylight. We were caught in a tremendous push; vehicles hugged the road bumper to bumper. My driver had to urinate, but we could not find a place to stop. He kept looking at me and I just shook my head.

We watched the tired Colonel ahead of us, who was now asleep. His head bounced this way and that as his jeep hit holes and rocks in the road. It was amusing, but we did not laugh.

In Coutances, my driver nudged me once more.

"Captain, I've got to."

I still said no.

We were rolling down hill along with a great mass of vehicles; there were monster vehicles, tank retrievers and tank carriers, all moving east. These giants took command of the road wherever they went. My driver still kept after me. Then, I saw infantry troops relieving themselves from the vehicles ahead.

"Quick — use your helmet! I'll hold the wheel."

He calmly urinated into his steel helmet, emptied it, and put the gear back over his helmet liner. It was a big relief to both of us. We never forgot the incident, and frequently told the story when a discussion came up about the breakthrough at St. Lô.

Coutances was indeed a sight to remember. The main road



was a moving line of men and vehicles. The heat was terrific and the dust equally as bad. There were many bodies all along the road — some even hung from trees, where our advance tanks had met the Germans and blown their armor apart. Needless to say, the condition of the dead was frightful. I saw one body of a German hanging upside down from a charred, battered ambulance — a fitting death.

The surge was all eastward; nowhere was it possible to obstruct the moving tide. There was a solid wall of men, steel, and guns. There were jeeps; small, medium, and large trucks; trucks with bridges, rations, ammunition, gasoline; there were half-tracks, light tanks, medium tanks, and large Shermans; there was ordnance equipment, repair equipment; there were trailers, moving vans, laundry trucks, sterilization and bath trucks, refrigeration trucks, and thousands upon thousands two-and-a-half-ton trucks carrying troops. These were all moving — moving east, moving in the greatest exploitation of a breakthrough in the history of warfare. This was the U. S. Third Army, an army of stout hearts and hardened nerves. It was a grand, superb, gigantic army, bigger than the world had ever seen. It carried the finest equipment engineered by man by the "blood, sweat, and tears" of the American people. Now this equipment was in use — in use by American troops, led by a genius of a general, George S. Patton, Jr.

The troops of General Patton looked tired; they were tired. Still, their faces betrayed an eagerness to close with the enemy and annihilate him. This was war in stark reality — a war to destroy the enemy wherever he could be found. Here was the climax to the long weeks, months of training. Here was the greatest show on earth, the best the world had to offer. It was



a strange sight, hardly believable unless one was in its midst. It was unbelievable that so many young men from America should now be on this stage, performing their greatest sacrifice for God and country. It was strange to see so many youths, some not much over seventeen, crowded like fish in a tin can, loaded like animals, surging east in a terrible struggle for victory; strange to know that many were moving to probable, certain death.

These faces ahead of us were from Detroit, Cincinnati, Houston, Brooklyn, Atlanta, Grand Rapids, Memphis, Los Angeles, and a thousand and one other cities. They belonged to the 5th Infantry Division, the 35th, the 6th Armored, and host of other units in the XX Corps. They belonged to other Corps and other Armies; they belonged to many divisions—the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 8th, 9th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 79th, 83rd, and 90th Infantry Divisions. There were armored divisions, too: the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th. At the head of the drive was the XX Corps of the Third Army under the leadership of Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker.

There was no stopping in Coutances — the momentum of moving men and steel was too great. From there, the drive took us toward Avranches, where the German Seventh Army and elements of four infantry divisions tried to cut us off. Their artillery was poised in the hills around Mortain, and the narrows at Avranches were shelled heavily. Their 88's screamed down upon us and tried to knock out the bridges ahead. When they succeeded, our tanks by-passed the bridges by taking to the shallow streams, and soon had a usable ford for the other vehicles. Meanwhile, our engineer troops repaired the bridges and the drive continued.



Back in Paris, dissension broke out in the German High Command. Rommel insisted on holding the Allies in Normandy; von Rundstedt tried to persuade Hitler to deploy his armored forces around Paris. This confusion resulted in a hasty conference, so I was told, in which some significant changes in command took place. Again, Rommel was the center of the conference. Hitler was unable to attend, and sent von Kluge, Keitel, and von Rundstedt in his place. Rommel was angry and bellicose; he insisted that the forces under his command could not hold off the Allied onslaught without help.

"The forces at my disposal are insufficient," he said. "I need more armor for my defense line along the coast. I must have it if we are to break off Patton's drive to the east. Give me some of the Panzer forces held in the Pas de Calais region and I will hurl the invader back into Normandy."

When the Paris conference ended, Field Marshal von Rundstedt, Commander in Chief West, was relieved by Colonel General von Kluge. Both he and Rommel now wanted to evacuate all of southwestern France and save what forces were still intact. They talked of destroying all usable ports to prevent them from falling into Allied hands. According to a statement by General George C. Marshall, American Chief of Staff, von Kluge recommended defense of the general line, "lower Seine-Paris-Fontainbleau-Massif Central." Hitler refused to accede to this plan and personally ordered the Avranches-Mortain counterattack. He relieved von Kluge of command and again appointed von Rundstedt as Commander in Chief West. What happened to Rommel is not certain. Some say he was wounded; others say he took ill and had to be relieved of command.



At Percy, just north of Avranches, my unit broke away. We had work to do. Our destination was a small orchard about three kilometers away from the crossroad. We drove our vehicles under the apple trees and sat down to rest. After lunch, we dug our fox holes. Then we had to discuss our plan of action. There were many bodies to be picked up. As Germans were in all the by-passed woods, we would have to be careful. As we sat in conference, a colonel came running down the lane and asked if we were a G. R. Company. I answered that we were, that we had no orders, maps, or anything.

"Captain," he said, "you're in Patton's Army now. Clean up the dead from the main highways, away from the sight of moving troops... immediately."

I saluted him in astonishment and he left as fast as he had come.

I called all the men together, gave them a short warning, and said, "Go to it."

They leaped into their trucks and waited for their area assignment by the executive officer. Suddenly they all noticed that somthing important was missing—the trailers for our trucks! We couldn't haul bodies without one-ton trailers attached to our weapons carriers.

# Corpses, La Loupe and St. James

I had tried to get trailers in England but was politely told that our Tables of Organization did not allow for them; I would have to get special authorization from General Patton. When the colonel came back and heard about the trailers, he looked at me, thought a moment, and said, "At 1:30 this afternoon you will have twelve trailers at the Percy crossroad. Send



your motor officer to pick them up. Keep them — they will be yours."

At 2 o'clock, Lt. Donovan roared into our orchard with twelve weapons carriers, each pulling a new one-ton covered trailer; they were borrowed vehicles from a colored company.

We marked the trailers and sent the men to work immediately. It wasn't necessary to mark the carriers, for in short order they were well identified. We cleaned them every day, but the odor of death permeated them in spite of all we could do. It was strange to travel through a village, only to have the other troops hold their noses and beckon us fast passage. We always had the right-of-way.

Our three-quarter-ton trucks carried personnel and equipment, and we never dared to contaminate them with bodies, no matter what the condition. It was definitely good for our morale to be able to detach the trailers and be free from their odor when we bivouacked in the fields at night. Frequently it was necessary to keep corpses in the trailers overnight and deliver them to the cemetery the next day. The trailers were covered with a heavy canvas, and could carry a maximum of thirty bodies. Twelve or fifteen bodies, as a rule, were sufficient to warrant a trip back to a U. S. military cemetery.

That evening at Percy, we prepared for bed early. We dug our holes a little deeper — but not deep enough, we soon discovered. The evenings were none too quiet around Avranches. Hitler had ordered a counterattack, to cut off General Patton, isolate him, and drive the First Army, the British, and Canadians back into upper Normandy.

The woods around us teemed with Germans; we could hear them sniping in every direction. They were from many



infantry divisions, or what was left of them. Our own lines were very indefinite. My men had to find the lines themselves. They would move in one direction, searching for bodies, until a machine gun or sniper opened fire; then they would make a hurried retreat and mark the danger zone on their maps. One section of the company was driven out of St. Malo by German artillery and machine guns. The city did not surrender for several weeks after it had been by-passed by our 6th Armored Division.

That evening, darkness fell over Normandy very late. Most of the men were asleep in their holes; a few were still out delivering bodies to Blosville. I was worried about their safety and that of the trucks. Around our bivouac, cows and horses grazed leisurely; they were friendly animals and we were more than glad to have them around.

Around 11 o'clock a horse's neigh broke the silence. We heard the drone of motors — German aircraft in the distance. Closer and closer came the hum of motors until several planes were directly overhead. They dropped white flares and lit up the Norman countryside like day. Then the planes disappeared. My guards chased everyone into their holes and waited patiently at their posts. Maybe this was just a scare. We had seen enemy planes before, but never quite like this.

A few minutes later, several hundred bombers roared into Normandy, searching for targets. Flares marked the bridges and ammunition dumps. The planes circled overhead in great waves, ready to give us a good working over.

Then all hell broke loose. The ground shook. The cows bellowed, the horses screamed in terror. The nearby gas dumps burned in fiery heat. The ammunition at Avranches and Percy



exploded — it popped all night long. We were bombed for forty-five minutes; this was our first real bombing and we shook like little rabbits.

At 2:30 A. M., we were bombed once more by more than 300 aircraft. This raid was not so close — the nearest bomb hit 25 yards from my tent. Before, our stoves had been pitted with shrapnel.

Next morning, we inspected the damage. It wasn't bad, just huge holes all through the pasture. The men were safe — no one was even scratched. In the quiet sunlight, we were more eager than ever to go on with our work.

After Percy, we moved to St. James, above Fougères. Here was a military cemetery operated by the 3042nd Graves Registration Company. We came to help. The cemetery was a poor one: the ground was sloped and rocky, the vehicles had little room, and the crosses ran downhill. The company said that some advance colonel had selected the area; he had made a grave mistake. Unfortunately, this occurred too often. Had graves registration officers picked the sites, much of this difficulty could have been avoided. These men had studied locations, soils, and all the features that make a good cemetery. Later, they were given more freedom, and the cemetery sites were chosen in better localities.

Other mistakes were becoming apparent. We found that our guide, a manual written by an officer in England, was of little use, except as a pattern for the general layout of graves and the procedure to follow in caring for personal effects. The big mistake was that not enough importance was given to graves registration before OVERLORD. High officers now knew this



and began to attach more weight to this important phase of service.

Each Army and Base Section in the Communication Zone had its own graves registration procedure, which was confusing. There should have been one unified command, one organization to which every Division, Corps, Army, and Base Section was responsible. This was not done until hostilities in Europe were almost at an end. Now one Graves Registration Command, under the direction of the Quartermaster General, handles all functions relative to burial of service dead. The Navy and Marine Corps has a similar, although not such a broad, plan.

### The Drive to Paris

On August 3, the German Seventh Army tried to cut the Avranches corridor. For four days, vicious Panzer troops lunged forward, trying to close in on Avranches. The American 35th Infantry Division, which had distinguished itself in World War I with Harry Truman as artillery captain, held the Germans at bay. When this counteroffensive failed, Hitler could not comprehend the audacious exploitation of the American breakthrough at Avranches. Neither he nor Keitel could understand how Patton was able to drive around Pontorson, St. Malo, and across the Brittany Peninsula.

I was in St. Hilaire the evening the Germans counterattacked, and was nearly taken prisoner. My jeep driver and I escaped by beating a hasty retreat to the woods and taking refuge with the 35th Infantry Division's Quartermaster. Here our second platoon, under Lt. Zajicek, lay hidden from the main drive while German patrols roamed the highway all night long. Next day, the Americans again threw the enemy out of St.



Hilaire and pushed on toward Mortain.

Mortain was in the hills, a hard sector for fighting. The Germans used a preponderance of armor and it took one of our entire divisions to dislodge them. The tank warfare tore up the countryside badly. Our Shermans charged against the enemy Tiger tanks and were ripped apart. German 88's were powerful guns, and drilled our thin armored tanks with surprisingly little effort. Their armor-piercing shells tore through our tanks from front to rear, setting them aftire easily. I saw one giant Tiger tank stopped in its tracks, but only after a dozen American Shermans had cornered it in a wood, and poured a ton of hot shells against its powerful concrete and steel body.

When the Germans escaped, they frequently stole back to their tanks in the dead of night and booby-trapped them. We ran across huge mine fields and hundreds of booby-trapped vehicles. On one occasion, we even located a booby-trapped German body, complete with trip wires. This was sickening. Our men hated such a despicable trick. They were careful and never got hurt; graves registration men in other units were not so fortunate.

During the Mortain counterattack, the British Second Army opened its offensive, driving the enemy back in the north. In the earlier stages of this campaign, our First Army captured 76,000 prisoners; the Third Army captured 31,500; together, the two Armies buried 20,942 enemy dead. The battle of Normandy was nearing an end; the Germans were in full retreat.

The drive eastward toward Paris was headed by the XX Corps; we were ordered to keep up with it. We moved seventeen times in as many days. While we moved to Le Mans, La Loupe and Chartres, the American 6th Armored Division



Acme Photo

Nazi weapon — mined graves found along the road in Normandy.

roared to Pontorson, St. Malo, Brest, Lorient, and St. Nazaire.

Our company was split up when we left St. James. My headquarters and first platoon stayed together; Zeke and his second platoon were with the 35th Division. Williams and his third platoon went with the 5th Infantry Division that raced for Fougères, Rennes, Angers, and finally stopped for breath on the banks of the Loire River. The Division Quartermaster liked Williams and wanted to keep him; he knew a good graves registration officer, and a good unit, when he saw one.

The fourth platoon, commanded by Lt. Schreiber, was off with the armored drive headed for Paris. Near Chartres, this platoon was nearly ambushed by a French patrol when they were mistaken for Germans in a bivouac area just off the main highway leading from La Ferte Bernard. Schreiber was suddenly aroused from sleep one night by the muzzle of a French soldier's gun. Only through quick judgment did he prevent his unit from being annihilated.

When our headquarters and first platoon pulled out of the orchard at St. James, the old Frenchman in whose backyard we had bivouacked pleaded with us to stay. He could not bear the thought of losing the Americans who had been such good friends to him and his family. His wife could no longer sell us milk, nor could Dubair himself invite us into his home for a drink of cognac or calvadose.

"Monsieur Capitaine, ne partez pas," he lamented. "Le Boche kaput. Ne partez pas."

I replied in my broken French, "Oui Oui, Monsieur Dubair ... je part. Impossible de restez ici. La guerre est finie dans Normandie. Nous partons pour Paris avec le Generale Patton. A bientot!"



"Ah, Monsieur Capitaine, je comprend. Accordez-moi une minute pour un petit cognac, oui?"

We had our little drink of cognac, then pulled out of St. James, headed for Mayenne and Laval, in search of XX Corps Headquarters. We had verbal orders to stay with the Corps, come what may; it needed our help to care for the dead in its drive toward Paris and the Belgian frontier. Laval was hard hit by our tanks, and the bridges over the Mayenne River near the city showed the fury of battle at this important French town. When we roared through the city, huge buildings were still burning; many others lay smoldering in ashes. The French were jubilant, ran out to meet us with outstretched arms, offered wine, fruit, and pastry. Girls climbed aboard our trucks and hugged the men, smearing their bearded faces with bright red lipstick. It was fun being heroes for a day.

From Laval, we went to Le Mans, La Ferte Bernard, Nogent-le-Rotrou, and then La Loupe. Here we captured ten Germans who were trying to escape in a French truck. The people had them cornered against a building when we tore into the village. We quickly took them prisoners, herded them into their truck, and motioned the driver to move on. But the truck was stalled; the French had poured water into the gas tank. We changed to American gasoline; the truck sputtered, coughed, and finally ran well enough to pull out of town.

The truck driver was a Hungarian, at least so he informed me. Our prisoners were both Germans and Poles, some less than eighteen years old. They told me that they wanted to make a fast break for the American lines to escape from their German officers. When we left the village, we saw several American bodies lying in a ditch where, only a few minutes



before, they had been killed in cold blood. The prisoners looked at the bodies, turned their heads, and said nothing. We felt like killing all of them right then and there, but somehow we couldn't do it.

Many combat units refused to take prisoners. Even in hopeless situations, the Germans would usually fight to the last bullet, refusing to surrender. When their ammunition was gone, they were ready to give up and ask for mercy. As many American lives had been lost in this delay, our troops often killed the Germans when they made their bid to surrender.

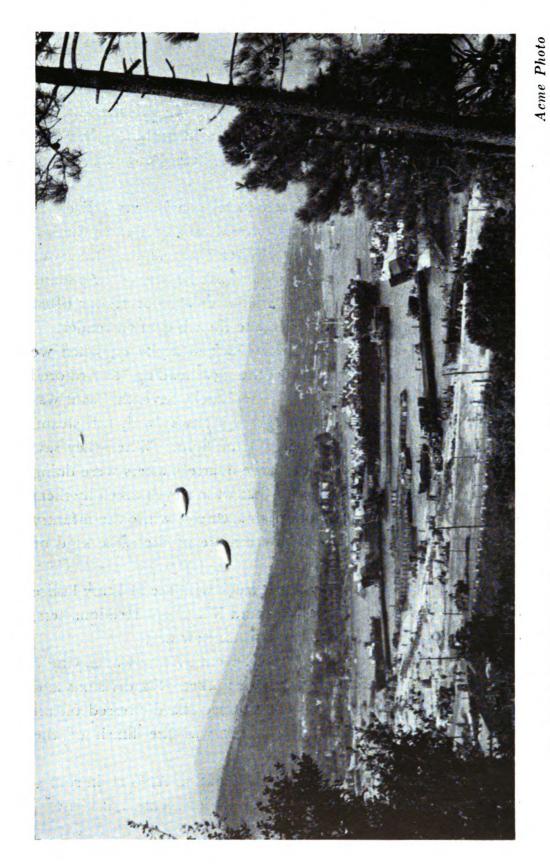
We moved back toward the Chartres highway; when we reached the road junction, we met the spearheading 7th Armored Division on their way to Paris. The "Lucky Seventh," as it was frequently called, was coming up the highway with full steam, guns ready for action, the men full of fight. When they saw us, they wondered what on earth we quartermasters were doing hauling prisoners out of an area that wasn't even taken by them yet. Their officers looked on in amazement, while the infantry troops cheered us and asked where more of the same kind of Nazis could be found.

We left our prisoners and the truck with the Military Police at La Ferte Bernard. There we found XX Corps Headquarters, and were relieved to be at last with our new unit.

In the meantime, the German Seventh Army was having a difficult time in the Falaise-Argentan pocket. Six divisions and elements on several others were trapped, hard pressed on all sides by three Allied Armies. This was the finish of the Germans in Normandy.

On August 15, we learned of Operation ANVIL in southern France. Here the Seventh Army, under Lieutenant General





Invasion beach, southern France, six hours after the first troops landed.

Alexander M. Patch, landed against little opposition and moved on to Marseille and the Rhone River. Fifteen hundred ships were used in ANVIL and three divisions of men—the 3rd, 36th, and 45th Divisions. These were led by Lieutenant General Truscott, Commander of the VI Corps. The big port of Marseille fell a week later, when the Free French of the Interior joined up with the Americans to drive the Germans out of the city.

Next day, on August 24, 1944, Paris was liberated by General Jacques Philippe Leclerc's 2nd French Armored Division. The German garrison surrendered the following day General De Gaulle entered the city on August 26, and became the new President of the Provisional Government of France. He reviewed the triumphant Allied troops with General Eisenhower near the Arc de Triomphe, in the heart of the liberated city.

Paris was one of the first capital cities to be retaken from the Nazis. It was a gay celebration; everyone was making merry with wine, cognac, beers, hugs, and kisses. French girls made love to the soldiers on top of tanks, and at night within them. Paris opened its heart to the liberators.

Our unit hated to leave the drive headed for Paris; we wanted to see the city. But no, our orders were to move back to St. James. The orders were verbal and quite confusing; it seemed we were yanked out of our most important mission. However, St. James wasn't so bad; we would have Dubair again, eggs, and cognac. We took our time, and went swimming in a lake somewhere east of Le Mans. The water was fine — we enjoyed our first good bath in weeks. From across the cove, French girls were watching us swim in the nude; we had to throw rocks at them to drive them away.





Allied leaders meet following the liberation of Paris — Lt. Gen. Bradley, Gen. Eisenhower, Gen. Koenig, and British Air Marshal Tedder.

We went back to Le Mans and discovered a huge abandoned German Army post. Everything was still intact. Here were chairs, candles, dishes, buckets, furniture, stoves, and a hundred and one things we could use. We sent a messenger back to the rest of the detachment to get more trucks and more men. Then we just helped ourselves. I found a huge German desk complete with keys. We lugged this thing all over France, Belgium, and Holland after that. I refused to part with it—it was the most valuable piece of furniture we had.

Here at the German post were hundreds of young Russian and Polish women, big and strong as mules. Some were very attractive and extremely well built. One heavy-set Russian girl, about seventeen years old, carried my desk out and loaded it onto the truck all by herself. She had been a German captain's girl friend and lamented that now she would be all alone. Would we take her with us? We explained that it wasn't an American policy to have women along with the troops, and that she would have to remain there until American authorities arrived and made some kind of arrangement for their repatriation to Russia.

These women worked like oxen slaving for the Germans. They did cooking, sewing, and washing for them during the day. At night they slept with the troops, the best-looking ones going with the higher ranking officers. Among more than several hundred young girls, not a single one showed evidence of pregnancy. The girls said that they were regularly examined by German physicians.

From Le Mans, we headed for St. Corneille, a small village where an American cemetery was getting under way. Here we had our first tragedy, when one of our guards accidentally shot



and killed one of the men, who was mistaken for a German as he approached from a hedgerow at night. We rushed him to an evacuation hospital in blackout, but when we got there, our little comrade was dead. Next day, we had a beautiful service for him in St. Corneille.

When we reached St. James, we learned that the German Fifteenth Army was fleeing from Flanders. We also heard that the great port of Brest was under siege — under a coordinated air, land, and naval attack by Allied forces. In the east, the drive was reaching Belgium and Holland. Victory was in the making in western Europe.

## St. James and Montfort-Sur-Meu

At St. James, we went right back to our spot in farmer Dubair's orchard. He was glad to see us, and hoped that now we would stay until the end of the war in Europe.

We went to work cleaning up areas around Fougères, St. Malo, Avranches, Mortain, Percy, and Rennes. We were now operating under the Normandy Base Section in the Communication Zone. Our job was to sweep the battle areas for all dead, pick them up or disinter them, and transport all remains to the nearest U. S. military cemetery. This was called a "sweeping operation." We located many bodies in Mortain, where the fighting earlier had been so heavy; these we sent to St. James Military Cemetery. We ran into other units—among them, the 607th, 609th, and 612th Graves Registration Companies. Some were doing our type of work, others were operating cemeteries.

One rainy afternoon, a colonel came into headquarters and ordered us to move to Brittany. The entire peninsula had to be



swept for remains and cleared of all dead, enemy and Allied. It was going to be a full time job and would require considerable planning and judgment. I was to spot our four platoons throughout Brittany, to comb all areas for buried fliers, spies, and recent victims of the drive across the peninsula. Head-quarters should be somewhere in the center, to keep in close touch with operation of all units.

Once more we parted from Dubair. Once more the old Frenchman wept.

"Ah, Monsieur Capitaine, ne partez pas. Vos soldats sont bons, bons, bons. Ne partez pas, s'il vous plait!"

We split three ways upon leaving St. James. Schreiber went to Dinan in upper Brittany; Williams went to Guingamp; I remained with the rest of the company, headed for an area west of Rennes.

We found a convenient field for bivouacking, centrally located and well situated, just outside the village of Montfort-Sur-Meu. The village had been bombed heavily by our Air Force and the people were bitter toward the Americans. From all appearances, Montfort could not have been important enough to receive such a treatment. True, it was a rail center in mid-Brittany; but the bombs fell indiscriminately within two kilometers around the center of the village. The rail station was destroyed, but so was the village and the beautiful countryside for miles around. No wonder the impoverished French people did not show us a great welcome. Later, we learned the reason for the severe bombing; the Americans had thought there were many more Germans in the village than there actually were.

After we had been in the field at Montfort for several days,



the townspeople started coming to our orchard to see what was going on. They grew more and more friendly; it wasn't long before we were invited by the mayor to set up headquarters in the bombed-out village theater. It would certainly be much warmer and drier than the fields. Needless to say, we promptly moved into the battered building.

A few days later, a colonel from the Brittany Base Section charged into our new headquarters, intent on inspecting the kitchen. He didn't even bother to identify himself, but turned on Edwards, the bugler, who was sitting on a chair just inside the lobby.

"Go ahead, young man," he said grimly, "just sit there. I'm only a full colonel!"

Edwards jumped up in astonishment and threw the colonel a snappy salute.

"Captain," the colonel said to me, "what kind of an outfit do you have here? Have you ever heard of military courtesy?"

I answered that we were well trained, but that his sudden, unannounced arrival took us by surprise; we really had a good record.

Then he identified himself and asked to see our kitchen. Well, our kitchen area was in one corner of the main theater, near a dripping, partly open roof. Here Brennan was setting up his field ranges and supplies. Everything was neat, and as sanitary as the conditions permitted. But the colonel was not pleased.

"Sergeant!" he roared, "this is terrible! Do you see those ranges? They cost money. Clean them up! And this floor—it hasn't been cleaned in years! How long have you been here?"

"We just moved in, Sir," Brennan replied.



The colonel had nothing more to say; he left as quickly as he had come.

Soon the villagers began inviting us to dinner, to church, and to social gatherings. The mayor gave us a banquet. The village doctor came to eat with us, and we went, in groups, to eat with his family. We had come as friends, to locate the graves of our comrades, and were now more than welcome. The French gave us every help; they showed us where Americans were buried, gave us access to burial records of Allied fliers, and even helped us disinter the bodies from their own cemeteries.

Montfort no longer was unfriendly. The 611th Graves Registration Company gave the people a new insight into the character of the Americans. They loved us and hoped we would never leave. Montfort, the dead little French village, had come back to life

#### **Brest**

On August 31, the American First Army reached Sedan, scene of the German breakthrough in France in 1940. Dieppe fell, soon followed by Antwerp, Brest, and Aachen. The American casualties were heavy; by the end of August they numbered 112,673.

The 611th was ordered to Brest. I sent Zeke and the second platoon there, and the first platoon, under Jensen, to Lesneven, near Brest, to care for the German dead. Schreiber and Williams stayed where they were, and helped to shuttle American bodies to St. James.

One day I visited Zeke on an inspection tour. A quartermaster colonel had ordered him out of Brest, saying it was senseless to live in the bombed city. Other infantry colonels



working with Zeke refused to hear of such a move, and ordered him to stay on.

Zeke took me down to the shattered submarine pens and showed me how his men fished German bodies out of the water at low tide. The dead had rocks wired to them and were difficult to drag to the surface. This kind of fishing did not appeal to me.

Then we went into one of the abysmal pits beneath the shattered city of Brest. Here we found a nightmare of hell. Our lanterns hardly gave us good light, but we saw that the walls of the inner tunnels were charred black from a terrible fire. We descended a winding stairway, littered with hundreds of dead French people. They were in crawling positions, headed for the main exit. The dead on the stairs were so thick that we had to slide on top of them in order to descend. Some of the charred and burned women had reached the very exit before they were caught in the flames. Their faces were horrifying.

Where the tunnel leveled off, about 200 feet below the surface, we saw a ghastly spectacle. Branching off in several directions were hospital corridors, warehouses, storerooms, all ruined by the terrific fire, all filled with dead bodies. Our lights, faint against the black walls, showed us thousands of burned French. The odor was that of roast meat — roasted human flesh. Women were burned to beds, their babies pressed to their bosoms. Flesh and steel were all melted together. There were hundreds of children, burned alive; they were crisp as bacon, and crunched as we stepped over them. Men and women were praying for mercy, their arms flung heavenward; their faces showed agony and a fiery death. The bodies were thick beneath us — four, five, six deep. They stretched for hundreds of



meters, as far as we could see. There were French soldiers among the dead. There were doctors, nurses, and, they say, the mayor of Brest himself.

How all this happened was a mystery. Nearly a thousand Germans were trapped at the other, the south, end of the tunnel. It appeared as if the Germans, along with all the barricaded French, refused the order to evacuate, and were then burned to death during the bombardment of the city.

Brest was taken by the American 2nd and 8th Infantry Divisions, and the 6th Armored. Only after many long weeks of savage fighting was this once beautiful French city secured from the Nazis. The 6th Armored Division earned a nickname for themselves — "The Brassiere Boys." They trapped 40,000 Germans within the fortified city. The campaign lasted thirtynine days, although experts had predicted a longer time. The 29th Infantry also took part in the fighting, and helped capture the German 2nd Parachute Division.

We worked for weeks extricating the Germans. The French Government begged us not to touch the French dead; they planned to seal the tunnels and make them air tight. Our work was greatly hampered by inexperienced prisoners of war, very inadequate lighting equipment, the rubble, and one colonel who bothered us a great deal.

Our orders to move to Holland to join General Simpson's Ninth Army were most welcome. We were happy to get away from Brest.



### FATHER PIERRE HEYNEN

## Groot Welsden, Holland

In September, 1944, a young Dutch priest pedaled his way along a dusty road between Heerlen and Groot Welsden. Near a small crossroad, German guards were waiting. Father Heynen moved along, listening for the challenge.

"Halt! Your mission, sir!"

Pierre stopped, untangled his robes from the sprocket of his wheel, and answered, "I am a Dutch priest in the service of God. I am going to see a sick farmer in Groot Welsden. Here is my card. You may inquire further at the office of the Bishop of Maastricht."

"You are a Dutchman," cried one of the guards. "We cannot permit you to have that bicycle. Give it to me."

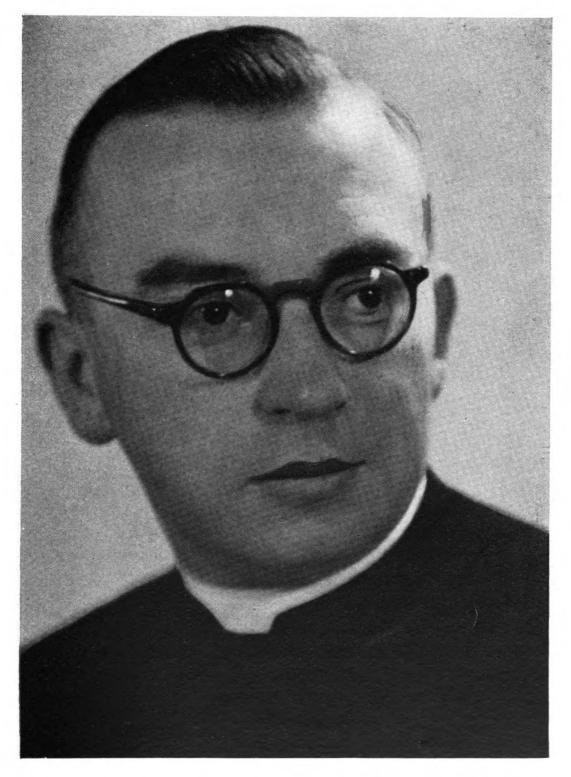
"I tell you, gentlemen, I am in the service of God. Permit me to go."

"God! You are in the service of our beloved Fuehrer. In his service you may go. Heil Hitler!"

Father Heynen rode on, but not without further scrutiny and suspicion. He vanished in the distant Limburg countryside.

In Groot Welsden, a small farm district not far from the village of Margraten, Pierre approached his home. He heard voices — German voices. An Infantry unit had taken over his





F. Lahaye, Maastricht
The Reverend Pierre Heynen, one of the educators in South
Holland, teacher at the College of St. Joseph at Sittard.

D

farm; the soldiers were laughing, drinking, picking apples in the orchard.

Pierre walked through the archway into his house. Mrs. Heynen was silent. She had just finished making waffles for three German officers, who were now eating in the front room. One of them was continually asking for Maria, Pierre's attractive sister. The priest kissed his mother, hung up his black hat, and went into the living room to meet the officers.

"Come in . . . come in, Father," came the greeting. "We have just had some of your wine. It is good. Will you join us?"

Pierre looked at the table, amazed to see that it was his holy wine they were drinking. He said nothing.

"Where is your sister Maria? She is pretty and I am a German. Fetch her here. We shall not trouble you or your farm. Bring her here — and your other two sisters. We are Germans."

The captain and his two lieutenants were drunk. Pierre could stand it no longer. He clutched his cross, came forward, and said, "My sisters are not here and will not be back this evening. I beg you to leave, in the name of the Fuehrer. Heil Hitler."

He led the inebriated officers to the door. They were laughing and muttering to themselves.

One of them staggered and said, "These Dutch are so dumb. Our Fuehrer has spoken. We Germans must unite for a Greater Germany; we are masters of the universe. These fools will be our servants. I wish I had Maria tonight. I would . . . "

Pierre thought to himself: Swine . . . they cannot take our souls. They may take our bodies, but they cannot take our souls. God be merciful to them, for they know not what they say or do.



As the officers stepped through the door, all three of them gathered their composure, wheeled around, and snapped, "Heil Hitler! Deutschland über Alles!"

## The Liberation of Limburg

In early September, the retreating Germans flowed through Margraten village, Limburg Province, like sheep through a fence. Some rode in cars, some in captured French, Belgian or Dutch vehicles, some in American jeeps. A few rode horses and mules; many thousands rode bicycles. Others just walked, their feet in rags, their uniforms tattered. They were a tired, defeated army of men. No longer were they super humans; they were just plain Germans in headlong retreat.

But still from the packed trucks came the cry, "Heil Hitler! Long live the Fatherland!"

Occasionally some young upstart would spot a Dutch girl and shout, "Don't worry, sweetheart. We'll be back in two weeks... in two weeks. Heil Hitler!"

In the village, only a few grownups greeted the retreating Nazis. Children were waving their arms and jumping up and down. The bigger the truck, the more noise it made, the more they laughed with glee. Their mothers watched from the windows, smiling behind the curtains, and praying. The liberation of Margraten was near.

Burgomaster Ronckers, the true mayor, was not in Margraten. He was still hiding in a stable northwest of Heerlen. The Nazi burgomaster of the village was preparing to flee. When the retreating Germans refused to pick him up, he took his suitcase and started off on foot down the Aachen highway. His days were gone in Margraten.



The day after he disappeared, the boom of artillery was heard across the Maas River. It was American artillery; the First Army was nearing Holland. Next morning, Maastricht, capital city of Limburg, fell to the Americans.

On September 13, 1944, Margraten was a free village. There was only a small skirmish; about twelve Germans were killed in the encounter. Burgomaster Ronckers' home was licked by hand grenades where a few American infantrymen used some Germans for target practice. Of course, there was the usual evidence: torn wires, trees, and branches; tattered clothing all over the highway; broken bottles, paper, garbage; slit trenches on both sides of the road.

When the Americans arrived, Margraten was a happy village. The people dressed in their best clothes. They brought out new flags, old wine, fresh beer, eggs, tomatoes, apples, milk, and flowers. The girls hugged every GI they could lay hands on — tankmen, jeep drivers, infantrymen. The children danced in the street; the men and women wept for joy. Burgomaster Ronckers returned.

The church bells of Margraten rang out its freedom. People went to church; they prayed in their homes, in their stables, in the fields. They prayed with everlasting gratitude to Jesus Christ, liberator of all liberators, for their long cherished freedom.

Greetings were exchanged everywhere. It was, "Goede Avond. Kan je Amerikaans spreken. Begrypt je dat? Waar kom je vandaan? woon je?"

Among the girls and GI's it was always, "Ik houd ran jou, lieveling!" (I love you, my darling!)'

There was much kissing (kussen or zoenen) and hugging



(knuffelen or omhelsen). But there was no sleeping in tanks.

Although the people of Margraten were joyful, they could not dance; Burgomaster Ronckers forbade it. Groot Welsden was not yet free; neither was Roermond, Venlo, Rotterdam. The people in the north still ate turnips, tulip bulbs, and onion soup. No, the citizens of Margraten must pray on.

#### Groot Welsden

The following day, September 14, all was quiet except for an occasional "whang" of a sniper's rifle. Pierre was at home He watched nervously from the window of his home, feeling that something was about to happen. He adjusted his horn-rimmed glasses and peered into the orchard.

Suddenly there was a flash of green; something darted behind a tree. Amerikaansen thought Father Heynen. Could it be? Now he caught glimpses of a khaki uniform. Something moved in the grass. It was a gun, a strange, heavy, automatic gun. A large helmet, green in color and covered with a net, slowly moved to one side. Now there was a figure completely visible in the grass.

Then, near the doorstep, a twig snapped. Pierre wheeled around and froze in his tracks. What was that? A boot squeaked. Pierre knew that a German was hiding outside his door; he could see the reflection in the other window. The soldier was kneeling down, rifle in hand, pointed in the direction of the orchard. All was still. Then the figure in the orchard moved ever so slightly. A little tree trembled. Two loud reports rang out!

There was a terrible scream on the doorstep. An American bullet had crashed through the skull of the German; he fell



dead. A red pool of blood spurted on the door and slowly dripped down—the last German blood to be spilled in Groot Welsden.

Meanwhile, a clanking American half-track was winding its way down the dusty road toward Groot Welsden. As it came in sight of the village, a German machine gun rattled. The half-track spun around and sped back toward Margraten. Soon, many tanks could be heard rumbling in the distance.

Father Heynen knew that an attack was coming. He thought of the homes, the cows, horses, and sheep that would be destroyed. With a prayer on his lips, he grabbed a bedsheet and opened the door. The dead soldier lay there, his face bathed in blood, the flies swarming all around. Pierre stopped, leaned over the corpse, made a Sign of the Cross, and ran into the road, frantically waving the bedsheet. He halted the tanks, explained that there were few Germans left in the little village. Twenty minutes later, Groot Welsden was free.

#### Eindhoven and Arnhem

These were hectic days in Holland. Americans and British descended on Nijmegen, Eindhoven, and Arnhem. The American 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions under Lieutenant General Brereton, together with the British 1st Airborne Division, made a surprising drop in the Reich, and attempted to hold the bridges over the Meuse and Waal Rivers. The British landed farther north at Arnhem. Land troops were to make contact with the airborne forces and thus turn the German right flank in the north. The enemy's opposition to this attack was so great that the operation failed. There were many casualties. American dead were buried in two cemeteries, one at



Molenhoek, south of Nijmegen, and the other at Zon, near Eindhoven.

Holland was the scene of other horrors. A new secret weapon was being launched from north Holland and directed toward London. This was the V-2, or "vengeance weapon," that went straight up in the air and came straight down. Over 1,000 of these rockets were fired by the Germans from sites in northern Holland and Germany. The V-1's were still being launched, also. Many of these were shot down over the Channel by the American and British "shooting gallery" of anti-aircraft guns. Of the 8,000 V-1's fired, 2,300 reached London, and seemed to do more damage than the V-2. Both of these weapons entered the war picture a little late; had they been perfected earlier, the whole pattern of the war could have been changed.

With the American and Allied forces closing in on Germany, General Eisenhower checked his schedule. He was five days ahead in his plan. Losses were heavy on both sides: Germany had lost 400,000 men; we lost 112,673. On September 28, 1944, he sent a message to his troops. It read:

"We come as conquerors, but not oppressors. We shall overthrow the Nazi rule, dissolve the Nazi party, and abolish the cruel, oppressive and indiscriminatory laws and institutions which the party has created. We shall eradicate that German militarism which has so often disrupted the peace of the world."

#### The Fall of Aachen

The first strike into Germany was in the vicinity of Aachen, on the Siegfried Line. It was made by units of the American First Army. When Crucifix Hill was taken, the big city was encircled, and its reduction began. After much terrible bom-



bardment, Aachen fell to the Americans. I remember it well. We were on our way from Brest to Holland. It was October 16; we were just leaving a nightmare of hell.

The Ninth Army had its headquarters in Maastricht, Holland. Antwerp was now free, and the Ninth Army was going to be the best equipped on the western front. General Simpson was to receive many new divisions. Great action was expected, and a big cemetery was needed. This, the Ninth Army's first big cemetery, was to be established near Sittard, twenty-five kilometers north of Maastricht. The 611th Graves Registration Company had been chosen for the job.



## IV

#### THE BIRTH OF MARGRATEN CEMETERY

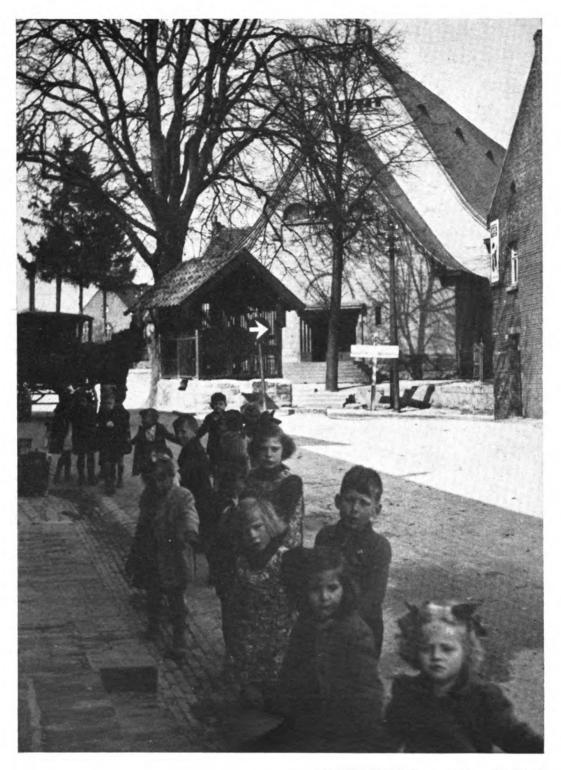
#### Sittard

The move to Holland from Brest was a long one. We traveled by motor convoy and by rail, and assembled near Tongres, Belgium; later, in the dead of night, we moved to Sittard. We nearly ran into the muzzles of an American artillery unit which was stationed on the line just east of Sittard. When we approached in blackout, a half-track was sent to meet us and investigate the disturbance. The artillery unit was ready to fire, when they discovered, that, instead of being a German armored column, we were simply graves registration troops, moving up into the front lines.

We went into the Artillery Observation Post, a large monastery, now full of Dutch children waiting for the Americans to drive the Germans away from their homes. The lines were only a thousand yards ahead, over the hill. Nothing was on the line except a few American machine guns and several batteries of our artillery.

Our location was good, but not very safe. However, we had artillery protection; our boys would fire over our heads, to prevent the enemy from counterattacking. Nevertheless, the artillery colonel told General Simpson that we were endangering his unit by working on our cemetery site, which was in plain view of the Germans. To make matters worse, the engineers





Studio Nico Zomer, Amsterdam Margraten village, Limburg, Holland.

came in to construct a road for us. Their big bulldozers alarmed the Germans. They thought a big American offensive was brewing just south of Sittard, and started to hurl 88's in our direction.

The colonel was furious, and asked headquarters to "get those . . . troops out of here and stop all this nonsense, or we'll pull out ourselves."

It wasn't long before we were looking for another cemetery site, twenty-five kilometers back, in the vicinity of Valkenburg. I picked two sites, both near the village of Margraten; I liked one of them particularly well. Captain Bailey, Graves Registration Officer for Ninth Army, approved the choice. Yes, this would be the location of the new Ninth Army Military Cemetery.

Everyone was happy about the new site; we could not start operating fast enough to suit ourselves or the Ninth Army. We moved to Margraten and went right to work. Our first job was to find a place to live.

# Margraten Village

Joseph van Laar was the village clerk in Margraten. He could read, write and speak good English, and proved to be most kind and helpful. Joe and I quickly became friends. He told me about some land that could be made available to us; it was just outside of the village and was excellent farm land. Although people made their living from it, they were willing to give it up so that American dead would have a resting place. Within a few hours, we had permission from Burgomaster Ronckers to establish a cemetery near Margraten.

We soon had buildings, too - barracks, an office, and a



mess hall. The Burgomaster insisted that Lt. Donovan and I stay with him in his own home. Joe persuaded Lt. Jensen and Lt. Williams to stay with him. Westlein, the motor sergeant, quickly made friends with Joe's brothers, and soon had a nice place in the stable, where he could be near his vehicles.

We certainly appreciated living in buildings. The weather was cold and it rained continuously. The buildings were good protection against buzz bombs, too; Margraten, as we found to our misfortune, was directly in the path of the V-1's.

The same day that we moved into the village, a colored service company moved into town and was billeted in an old fruit warehouse. It was the 3136th Quartermaster Service Company, sent to Margraten by the Ninth Army to furnish our labor for the new cemetery. Their building was big, cold, and drafty, hardly a place for hard working troops.

We were most fortunate to be in such a grand place as Margraten. The people were so friendly. Donovan and I had separate rooms upstairs in the Ronckers' home, but our friends continually invited us down to drink tea with them and eat apple pie. The house was modern in every respect. Mrs. Ronckers had an electric stove, gas and coal heat, a shower and tub, and a modern downstairs toilet. It was a brick home, and beautifully furnished.

Donovan liked his room and his needed rest. When he slept late in the morning, I had to prod him now and then to make him get to work on time. He was a good officer and a hard worker. We got along fine and trusted each other. I left him in charge of the company whenever I had to be away.

The home where Williams and Jensen stayed was not quite so luxurious, but just as friendly. The Laars waited on them



hand and foot. There were several girls in the family, which always made things more interesting. Jensen was more interested than Williams, as he was single. He was an officer in the Regular Army, and had seen service in the Aleutians. Despite his inexperience in graves registration work, he was a most capable officer and did a magnificent job at the cemetery.

The enlisted men lived in two school buildings. Headquarters personnel were billeted in the girls' school, across from the Ronckers' home. The rest were housed in the boys' school near the town hall. The walk between the two buildings was only a few blocks, and it gave the men just enough exercise.

The mess hall was located in the lower town hall, near the boys' school. This was Urban Brennan's pride and joy. Sergeant Brennan was from Du Pere, Wisconsin. He was forty-two years old, a butcher by trade. He knew his men well and was extremely popular. He had his own bakery in Margraten, his refrigerator in a local butcher shop, and a storehouse of food at every Class I distribution point. He saw to it that we were never without the best food.

While at Margraten, we came under the immediate command of the 548th Quartermaster Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Fisher was Commanding Officer. He liked the 611th and we liked him. He often came to Margraten on an inspection tour. He inspected the kitchen more frequently than any other place; there Urban would feed him ham and eggs, usually polished off with a steak dinner.

Brennan was always doing something for the men. If it wasn't cake from the bakery, it was beer, or better yet, a whole party. He was a great morale builder and we certainly needed a boost now and then. Sometimes the bodies at the cemetery



were in bad shape; the odor reached all the way to the village. When Brennan smelled it, he would run out to the cemetery with a pot of coffee and some cake. The men called him a "good egg," and could hardly wait for his mealtime call: "Come get it, boys, but don't hog!"

The kitchen also belonged to "Herman the German," a little Dutch boy of two, who was always around at meal time. The men liked him and fed him scraps of food, candy, and gum. Herman soon grew big and fat; he wore tight pants, and would cause his mother untold embarrassment when he sat down suddenly.

At the cemetery, Tech Sergeant Laughon began the surveying. He marked off Plot A, and we were ready to begin. Each plot contained three hundred graves, twelve rows with twenty-five graves to a row. They were numbered from left to right, bottom to top. Laughon was a good man with the transit and did a fine job of surveying.

Sergeant Charles Emmerich from Cincinnati had a good mind for organization; he was head of the office where all the typing and clerical work was done before our records were sent to Army Headquarters. He worked with Donovan, who was designated as Graves Registration Officer. Ed had to sign all the forms: Reports of Burial, Inventory of Personal Effects, Effects Receipts, and all money transfer forms. On some days he would sign as many as 3,000 papers.

# Negroes and Corpses

Our new colored company was full of likeable chaps. They were mostly from the south, and worked hard when they had an incentive. At least, we got the work done, and much of it was



gruesome. The boys ate all the time. If it wasn't regular chow, it was turnips in the field, apples, pears, even raw potatoes and cabbages. It didn't matter what the food was, just so long as there was plenty of it. They loved to march on their way to work and would strut along in the morning, marching a sharp one-two through the village.

The first day in the field none of the men got much done. They had been fed well, the first step in a good day's work. We encouraged all of the company to gather around the first plot and get ready for their new job. I told them that this was going to be their cemetery, that they would see it progress and grow, and that they were fortunate not to be the victims. They listened, and seemed raring to go. Still, they hesitated to leave the line when the first bodies arrived for burial. They looked and looked; then suddenly a few made a break for the latrine. Back they came, however, and looked again.

I heard one mutter, "Gruesome, ain't it. Sho' is gruesome. Ah can't stand workin' hyar. Ah's gonna dig graves. Yassuh, give me a shovel. You kin handle him. Ah's gonna dig graves."

The colored troops were trained to do all kinds of work. They unloaded bodies from the trucks and trailers, and lined them up in neat rows. They helped the medical sergeants do the "stripping." They put the bodies into mattress covers and carried them to the graves. They dug the graves, and later helped with beautification and cross alignment.

It was remarkable to see colored and white troops working side by side in this kind of work. There was never any argument and the good relationship was never broken.

One of the most interesting characters at the cemetery was Henry, a short, silent, bow-legged fellow, whose job was to



carry the ammunition away from the dead.

From the stripping line, the sergeants would call, "Henry ... Henreeee! Come, take this ammo down to the pit. And watch those grenades."

Henry would come, carefully take up the taped ammunition, place it in his basket, and trot off to the pit, muttering, "Lawdy . . . lawdy! If these ain't dangerous 'taters. Plumb dangerous. Yassuh!"

Then he would shake his bushy head, turn, and come slowly back to the line. None of us envied Henry, but we all liked him.

#### The Road

It was muddy and wet in Holland in November; it rained every day. A good road was a necessity; and Captain Bailey, of Ninth Army, said we would get one.

Soon a platoon of engineers appeared and began working on our new road. They said they would have it finished in two days, maybe three. It took them two months. The more they worked, the more it rained. The more it rained, the more their heavy equipment sank into the mud. It was exasperating. The platoon grew to a company, the company to a battalion. They'd build this damn road yet.

"Whoever heard of constructing a road over this kind of mud and in the rain? The bloke that picked this ugly spot for a cemetery should be strung up!"

That's what many an engineer thought. They looked at me queerly every time I asked how they were coming along. But they worked hard for us and stayed on the job.

However, they seemed to be getting nowhere. High-ranking officers came to look at the road, exhorted the men to



keep trying. Finally they tried gravel — one truck load after another was piled on top of the ooze, but it sank out of sight. They brought in rocks, huge rocks; these disappeared. Then they tried poles — which turned up at the ends and broke in two under the heavy trucks. Bulldozers were kept busy pulling the trucks out of the mud, and couldn't do their own work. Bigger poles were brought in, and finally, great logs from the battered Hürtgen Forest. The engineers spiked them together, corduroyed them, wired them tight. Then they poured on rock and gravel. Two months later, there was a highway four to five feet high, a masterpiece of road building. General Simpson could now make his inspection. He did not come.

In addition to the road, we needed fuel and beds. We had no lumber, so we sent Tyson back to Normandy and Brittany to get some. When he returned three days later, we had a spree of carpentry such as the village of Margraten had never seen. We built tables, benches, cots, signs, everything that was necessary for efficient operation. The people were amazed at our genius; they could not believe it.

Babcock was our official carpenter, and he worked especially hard. He had many children back in Ohio and worked hard for them. He could do anything, and certainly deserved his technical rating.

#### The First Service

On the first day of burial at the cemetery, we asked Father Heynen, from Groot Welsden, to give the burial service. He came early, riding his bicycle. He always carried a prayer book, and prayed as he pedaled or walked.

When we arrived at the cemetery, he prayed as the first



body was brought to the grave. It was Grave 1, Row 1, Plot A. The rain stopped, and we gathered around the little priest. We took off our helmets, bowed our heads, and prayed. Father Heynen opened his book and read aloud.

"O God, the Creator and Redeemer of all the faithful, grant unto the souls of thy servants and handmaids remission of all their sins; that through pious supplication they may obtain pardon which they have always desired. Direct, we beseech Thee, O Lord, our actions by Thy inspirations, and further them with Thy continual help; that every prayer and work of ours may always begin from Thee, and through Thee be brought to an end.

"Almighty, everlasting God, who hast dominion over the living and the dead, and showest mercy unto all whom Thou foreknowest will be Thine by faith and works: we humbly beseech Thee that they for whom we have resolved to pour forth our prayers whether this present world still detain them in the flesh, or the world to come hath already received them stripped of their bodies, may, by the grace of Thy fatherly love, and the remission of all the Saints, obtain the remission of all their sins. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

# Daily Services

Burial services were held at Margraten every day; this was insisted upon by our unit. Army Headquarters cooperated with us and saw to it that an Army chaplain arrived at the cemetery every day. On occasions there were several chaplains, each holding services for the dead of his faith. To supplement these services, our company held its own brief military service at the end of burial each evening. We usually had a small cortege,



followed by the bugler and a firing squad. After the prayer, volleys were fired over the cemetery; then came Taps with the lowering of the flag.

Father Heynen was usually on hand to say the prayers or give benediction. He seldom failed to say his daily mass in our tiny wall tent, even though it meant traveling more than four kilometers from his home in Groot Welsden.



### V

#### A BITTER WINTER

#### Winter Rains

With Ninth Army troops approaching the stubborn defenses of the Siegfried Line, enemy pressure became very formidable. Mines, booby-traps and vicious artillery took their toll of American combat men. Every day, corpses poured into the cemetery by the hundreds. German bodies came too, great truckloads of them, wet, messy, and horribly battered.

We buried the dead the best way we knew how, but unknowns ran pitifully high. Our medics worked day and night in the cold and rain — it rained constantly for six long weeks. Frequently we had to rush one of the medical sergeants to the hospital — blue streaks were reaching up his arm, a dangerous knot developing beneath his armpit. This was the primary stage of blood poisoning; sterile technique on the stripping line was virtually impossible.

Wet, putrified corpses had to be handled in the most expeditious manner. Rubber gloves were hot, cumbersome, and became useless when they developed holes and cuts. The men threw them away or burned them, then went back to work barehanded. Tooth charts and fingerprints were made of every unknown. This operation was time-consuming, tedious, and difficult. Corpses had to be dried in the morgue tent, their shriveled fingertips injected with fluid to fill them out more normally. No task, however, was too difficult or too gruesome



when the identity of a soldier was at stake.

The rains continued. Our graves filled up with water, our whole cemetery became a wet, oozing field of dirty crosses and mud-soaked men. Colored troops plodded through the mire, their boots heavy, their shovels sticky with soil. They could hardly dig; one grave a day under these conditions was good work. Their most trying task was disinterment — they hated to dig up a body once it was buried. However, this was necessary whenever belated information gave us further clues; positive identity could be established only by a post-mortem. On occasion we performed autopsies on bodies that had been buried as long as five months. They were still in fair condition; in fact, the doctors that made the examination marveled at the state of preservation.

One day Major General John C. N. Lee arrived from Paris to make an inspection of our cemetery. His clean, polished boots shone; he did not like our mud and said so. We came to Plot G and stopped. He gazed at the big piles of dirt and the water.

"What are all these graves doing filled with water? Why don't you do something about it? This is horrible."

I explained that it had been raining for six weeks and that we were having a difficult time. We were digging fresh graves and using them as we went along. The ones filled with water could be left for a later date.

"Why don't you get a pump and get the water out? Try it and see how it works. This is terrible."

A few days later, we tried his suggestion. It didn't work. Our only solution was to open new graves and let the bad ones go.

General Lee was Commanding General of the Communi-



cation Zone, with headquarters in Paris. He was a big man, on Eisenhower's staff. He was also big enough to admit a mistake, and to understand our difficulties.

When he left, he earned the respect of all of us by saying, "You're doing a good job here. Keep it up. The cemetery looks good."

In addition to the rain and the sickness that developed among the men, we had to put up with buzz bombs. They came over like clockwork, buzzing us thirty to forty times a day. I once saw a bomb land beyond Maastricht, and could feel the wave of hot air as the warhead exploded four kilometers away. A black cloud billowed upward for a thousand feet and spread for miles over the countryside.

Private Strok, in Lt. Zajicek's platoon, earned the Purple Heart for wounds received during a V-1 raid. The poor fellow ran into a barbed wire fence in an attempt to get away from the bomb. He tore great gashes in his face and was badly shaken when the projectile exploded just a few hundred feet away from him.

#### The Calm Before the Storm

In mid-November, we had a breathing spell at the cemetery. The fronts were pretty well stabilized. The First Army was at the Siegfried Line; Patton was near Metz; the Seventh Army, with the French First, was down in the Vosges. Simpson, in the north, was nearing the Roer River; Montgomery's men were on the Maas and in Brussels. Down at Henri Chapelle, with the First Army, the 606th and the 607th Graves Registration Companies were busy with casualties from the Ardennes; the 606th was collecting and the 607th was burying the dead.



On our front were the 605th G. R. Company and two of our own platoons, gathering bodies and operating collecting points. We were not very busy at Margraten and the recess was most welcome. The men went on pass to Valkenburg, Maastricht, Liège, and Paris; they deserved a rest. We authorized passes well over our allowance; but the men were well behaved and never caused any trouble whatsoever.

Then, the weather turned cold in Holland. Frost came and the ground froze over at the cemetery, making it necessary to use picks. The uncovered earth froze into huge lumps, which had to be pried loose before it could be shoveled into the open graves. The men had a hard job.

Back in the village, we played bridge every evening at the Ronckers' home. Donovan and I became fairly good at the game, but still couldn't beat the wily Burgomaster and his partner, Father Heynen.

Our bridge game was nearly always interrupted by buzz bombs; we soon wore a path to the Ronckers' cellar. There we would take pears or other fruit and munch away until the attacks were over. Donovan grew terribly nervous, and so did I. I finally developed intestinal trouble and had to go to bed regularly. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, we would have to run for the cellar. But this was a lot of trouble, and we soon learned to sleep through the buzz bomb attacks and anti-aircraft fire.

# Limburg

During our many bridge sessions, Father Heynen and the Burgomaster told us the story of Margraten. The priest was a professor, working for his doctorate, and was preparing a book



on the dialect of Limburg Province. He told us about its colorful history; this little neck of Holland had always been a crossroad in the warpaths of great conquerors.

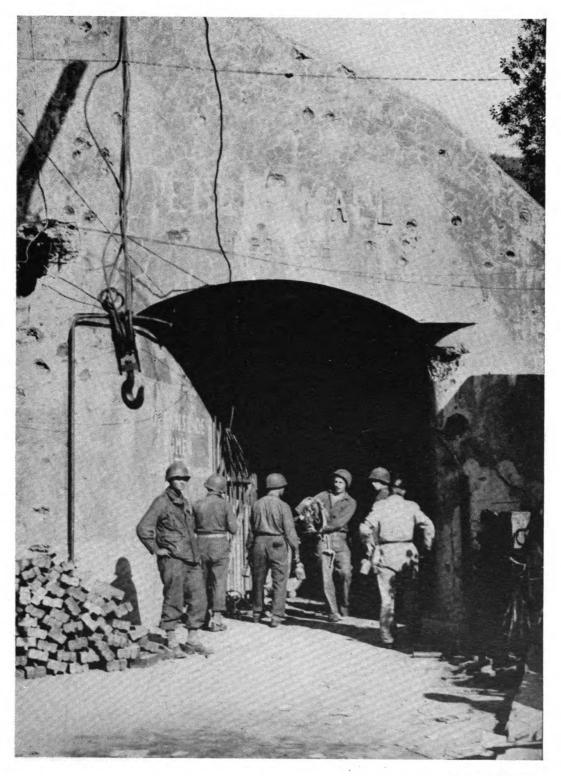
Margraten received its name from "Maria ad gratus," the old chapel on the hill between Maastricht and Gulpen. The village was named after St. Margareta, a patron of the Church of Margraten and of the hamlet. Its history was connected with that of Gulpen, which lay down the hill toward Aachen. The road between them was traveled by the early Huns and Francs. It was used by Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon, Bismarck, and in this war by Hitler himself.

When the Nazis marched into the Lowlands, in May, 1940, they came through this part of Holland. After passing Maastricht, they made an airborne attack on Fort Eben Emael, on the Maas River in Belgium. It was a big fortress, built entirely underground. It had tunnels and huge rooms that could house a division of men. There were railroad tracks, guns, camouflaged pits, blockhouses, and huge cannons that could fire as far as Aachen. This fort was the strongest in Europe. It fell in a matter of hours.

Mathias Kemp, in his book, This Is Limburg, writes:

"It is essential to distinguish between The Netherlands and Holland. The Kingdom of the Netherlands today contains eleven provinces — two of which are North and South Holland. This western area became the most important, due to the large ports and the presence of financial and shipping concerns. Educational centers of great renown also were located in this region. The great influence of the material and spiritual richness of these provinces has forced the name of "Holland" upon the country known politically as the Kingdom of the Netherlands.





 $Acme\ Photo$  Historic Fort Eben Emael captured by the Yanks.

A parallel example can be seen in England, which has given its name to the political entity, "The British Isles."

"The character of traditional "Holland" is greatly determined by the religion of the preponderant Protestant population. Limburg, nearly all Catholic, is entirely different. The "Dutchman" is characterized by a certain sobriety and reticence, while the Limburger on the contrary is emotional, exuberant, communicative, and gay."

About the scenery, Kemp says:

"Hardly have we left Sittard behind us, when we see hills and valleys, each time higher and deeper, break the evenness of the earth's surface. Soon we reach clay soil (loess) of the valley of the Gulp and Geul. This soil being very rich and fertile, cornfields abound.

"It is a romantic landscape with strong contrasts. Beside the wealth of ripening cornfields and blossoming orchards there is the dark mystery of caves and quarries, an underworld so extensive as probably nowhere else in the world. The "realm of the seventy-seven caves" these endless labyrinths are called. The best known among them — both to scientists and tourists — is St. Petersburg, near Maastricht, in the eighteenth century often called the eighth wonder of the world. Indeed, however damaged by modern industry, these complex subterranean galleries may be looked upon as the most famous of all the Limburg caves and quarries.

"This country with its stately churches and romantic castles, with its hills and looming blue skies in the distance, its idyllic valleys, its caves and cornfields, its legends and sagas, its processions and merry carnival days, its coal mines and egg markets — this is our Limburg."



### The Storm Breaks

It had been a long time since Burgomaster Ronckers came home from his stable in Heerlen. He liked the sound of American and English planes as they passed over Margraten day and night. He acquired a taste for American cigars, and began to learn English. His bridge was good and getting still better under Father Heynen's tutelage. Everything was fine until new combat units moved into town.

The Burgomaster lodged two colonels in his home and found rooms for a dozen more. Margraten was a small village of 1500 inhabitants; although the people wanted to make everyone welcome, 25,000 troops were too many. They went everywhere — into homes, stables, barns, attics, the town hall, orchards, and fields. Tanks and trucks took up all the space Margraten had to offer; still, some of the vehicles had to stay out on the road toward Groot Welsden.

On Highway No. 1, running from Maastricht to Aachen, grew piles of American shells. Thousands of tons of ammunition were dumped right in our front yard. Toward Maastricht, the highway was lined deep on both sides with powder, 105's, 155's, 240's, small arms ammunition boxes, grenade crates, and tons of TNT. It was good to see all this power; one more drive and Germany would be through.

Colored men were handling the big shells. Sometimes they let them roll off the trucks and drop on the frozen ground or the concrete highway. The operation was a nervous thing to watch and we admired the men for their nonchalant handling of this potential death and destruction.

On December 17, we were listening to the radio in the



Ronckers home; we were going to play bridge and were waiting for Father Heynen. Mrs. Prins, a close friend of the Ronckers, and Eleanor, her married daughter, were in the room at the time. Eleanor's husband was in Dachau; he was a Dutch doctor, and was taken away before the Americans arrived in Holland.

Suddenly, there was an exciting announcement over the London BBC network. The Germans, under Marshal von Rundstedt, had launched a surprise attack on the American lines in the vicinity of St. Vith, in the Ardennes. The word spread like wildfire through the village. The Burgomaster shook his head.

"Monsieur Capitaine! Vite! Votre carte!"

I ran upstairs, got my maps, and came down. The Germans had broken through our lines about thirty kilometers away. This was serious. I turned to Donovan.

"Ed, better get the company alerted right away — put on a double guard. Send extra men to the cemetery and tell them to be on the watch for paratroopers. Take some more carbines along. I'll notify the detachment here and the rear area."

Mr. Ronckers became quite nervous, although he seldom displayed any tension whatsoever. He spoke once more in French—he spoke French when he was either nervous or wanted to make something particularly clear.

"Capitaine, voulez-vous une cigarette? Montrez-moi, Capitaine, ou y-a-t-il les troupes Allemandes? Combien divisions?"

Then he calmed down and spoke in English.

"De Boche iss tuff . . . is not through. Dey still can do much damege. Dis vill be a hard Christmas for you Amerikans and for us. Do you tink the Germans vill go far? De Ardennes iss difficult country, full of mountains and voods



... how you say in Amerika — hard, impene-trable terrain, not like our Limburg."

I said that I thought the Nazis were making their last attempt to push the Allies back from Germany and that their push would fail.

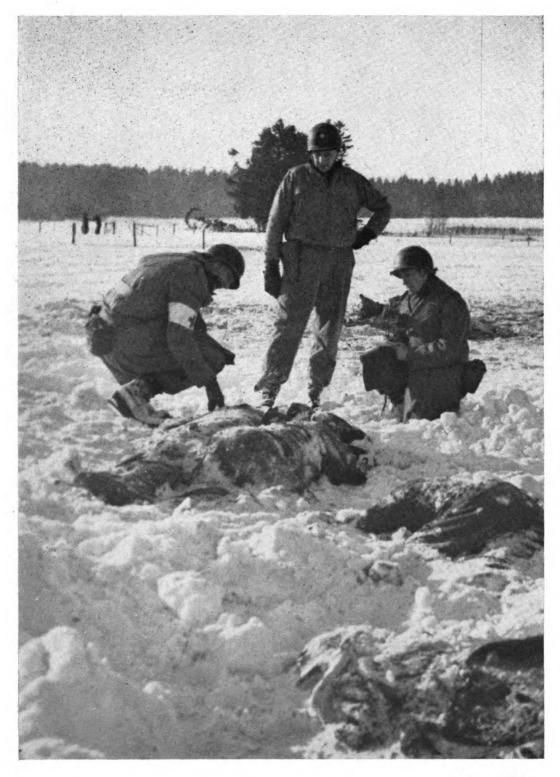
"Just wait a few days, Burgomaster, and see what happens. If we would only get a break in the weather!"

I left hurriedly, called a meeting of the non-commissioned officers, and told them about the counteroffensive. One man was sent to the 3136th Service Company to tell Captain Abar that we were taking additional steps to safeguard our installation, and to ask him what protective measures he was planning to use. Messengers also went to two other units, a truck company and an anti-aircraft battery. We needed a coordinated defense plan to prevent any possible mistake in identity.

Soon we had an effective plan worked out for the village and for all the installations around Margraten. It was good to have this extra strength, although later we found we were never in any great danger of attack. There were many combat divisions around us to prevent any serious mishaps; still, we couldn't help feeling uneasy when division after division was making a headlong retreat through Margraten, rolling back toward Maastricht.

One evening there was great excitement in the village. A regiment of the 75th Infantry was just pulling into town, along with the "Victory Division," the 5th Armored. Troops and tanks were everywhere — in the fields, along lanes and sideroads, in every orchard. Margraten had never seen anything to equal it. The American 75th was new on the continent; the





Acme Photo Identifying victims of Nazi massacre in Belgium following the German breakthrough in the Ardennes.

unit had just come off the boats, only nineteen months after its activation. Before the men could establish themselves in our village, they were yanked away and sent into action against the northern salient of the Ardennes drive in Belgium. There they stayed for twenty-six cold, bitter days, making a glorious name for themselves.

The 5th Armored, on the other hand, stayed a little longer in Margraten. When they finally went into action during the Bulge campaign, they tore the German units apart by rushing in at various points and inflicting terrible casualties. This was a fighting outfit and had many bitter experiences clashing with the Germans in the Hürtgen Forest and along the Roer River.

When the divisions left our village, it was apparent that the breakthrough in the Ardennes was very serious. The bad weather continued, and our planes were grounded back in France and in England. The 106th Infantry Division, of the American First Army, was chopped to pieces. It was holding about twenty-five miles of the wooded, hilly Ardennes country, known as the Schnee Eifel, near the city of St. Vith. Of this division, the 422nd and the 423rd regiments held out for two ghastly days against a tremendous artillery barrage, against tanks, English-speaking Nazi SS troopers, and Germans in American uniform. When their ammunition ran out, they were annihilated. The other regiment, the 424th, hung on to the city as long as it could, and helped to keep it from the enemy for a considerable time. When the skies cleared over St. Vith, the 106th Division was no more — 8,663 men were lost, 7,000 of whom were prisoners.

Back in the office at Margraten, I received scant information on the breakthrough, and charted Rundstedt's operation GREIF



on our wall map. He was using elements of the Sixth Panzer Army and all of the Fifth; these were supported by the Seventh Army, stripping Germany of nearly all its strategic forces, seriously handicapping its strength on the eastern front, where a powerful Soviet offensive was in the making.

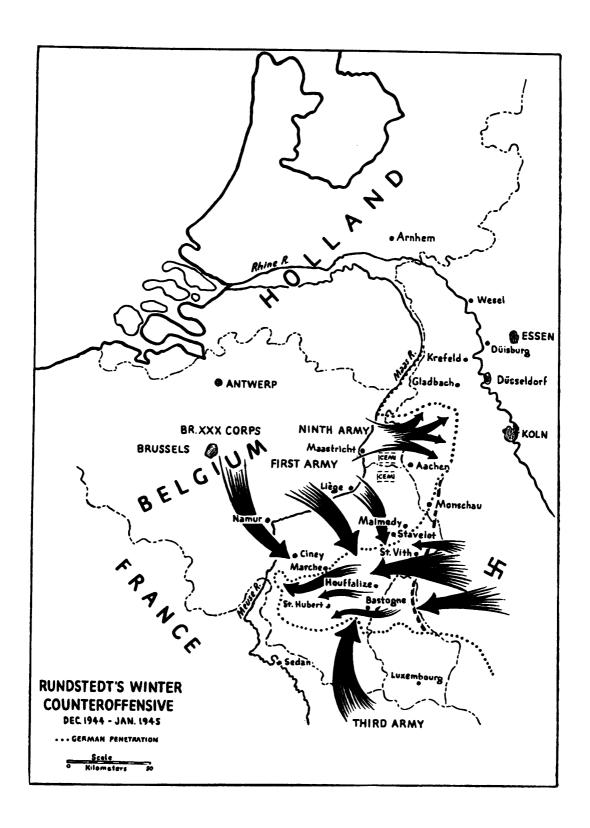
The Germans broke through on a forty-mile front, the initial blow being made by eight Panzer divisions, followed by sixteen other divisions which made diversionary attacks in the north and south, and helped to exploit the tremendous opening. This force, which was assembled secretly during the early months of the fall and winter, was ordered into action by Hitler himself. He outlined the objectives to his best and most trusted generals, and then departed for Berlin to direct the attack against the oncoming Russians. There he stayed until the Allies closed in on him from both the east and the west.

The Ardennes counteroffensive continued with unabated fury. The Nazis were nearing Bastogne and driving for Marche, southwest of the big communication center of Liège. In the north, Rundstedt was pressing hard toward Spa, where the First Army had temporary headquarters and was trying to break into Liège. In the center, Panzer forces were racing to Rochefort and the Meuse. Paris, Liège, and Antwerp appeared to be the principal objectives in the great counteroffensive. Once more, Hitler's legions were on the march to destroy the Allies in western Europe.

## Silent Night, Holy Night

A week after Rundstedt launched his attack in the Ardennes, the weather began to turn in our favor, permitting our tactical air forces to strike furiously at the German armored







columns and lengthening supply lines. The Nazis were more than fifty miles inside the American lines, and were approaching the Meuse not far from Namur. On December 24, at supper in the mess hall, I read SHAEF's General Order to the men again. We, too, must "rise to new heights of courage and resolution and turn the Germans' greatest gamble into their greatest defeat."

In the girls' school, a midnight mass was planned by Father Heynen and the sisters of St. Julia. The children brought flowers, evergreens, chairs, colored crepe paper, and decorated the room where the mass was to be held. The service was to be given principally for the soldiers and a few friends in the village. Not over fifty people could attend, as the room was small.

When mass started at midnight, an air raid was on and our anti-aircraft guns were hurling tracer bullets at the enemy. With each barrage, the candles flickered and nearly went out. Father Heynen came to the altar quietly, unmindful of the guns outside. Eleanor had her accordion, and led the choir in carols and hymns. There was an atmosphere of indescribable spiritual uplift, an exalted feeling of great splendor, sensed by all of us who attended.

When Father Heynen finished the Gospel, he turned slowly, a little nervous, and began his much practiced sermon in English. This is the way I remember it:

"In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen. My dear friends, soldiers and citizens of Margraten. This evening as we celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we should be mindful of God's presence. Knowing He is with us, we should not fear. Terror is seeping through the world this



Christmas night — terror among the heathens, disbelievers, and agnostics; but we are tranquil — the Christian soul is tranquil because Christ is really present upon this altar and every altar throughout the world. Let the heathens rave, as they are raving tonight, with their planes, their bombs, their last desperate effort to throw off the yoke of punishment which is surely coming to them. But for us . . . let us pray, pray hard and think about the Babe in Bethlehem — our Son and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

"My friends, we gather here tonight to pay homage to Him for His divine goodness. We pray that this terrible war may soon end and give back to us the blessings of liberty and freedom which we have so long cherished. We do not know the full fury of God's wrath upon our enemies for their wickedness; we do know that he is infinite and just.

"Pray hard, my friends, for only through prayer will come good weather for battle. Only through prayer will come airplanes, tanks, courage to hurl the invader back into his scheming, turbulent world of evil and lawlessness.

"We know little of what is happening this night. But tomorrow will be Christmas. We will commemorate the birth of our beloved Saviour — Jesus Christ. The babe in Bethlehem brought the light of understanding to the world. He will show us the way to turn defeat into victory.

"Be stout of heart, be courageous, be prayerful, my beloved, for the Almighty is with us. The free peoples of the world will march to victory and trample down the heathens.

"O loving Father, we pray for protection. Protect these soldiers, protect all of us, so that we may serve Thee on this



earth as well as in the everlasting life to come. In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen."

So spoke Father Pierre Heynen on Christmas Eve, 1944, in the tiny village of Margraten, Holland.



### VI

#### **BASTOGNE TO BERLIN**

### Merry Christmas

In the Ronckers' home, we held a quiet celebration. There was a strange uneasiness, with Rundstedt making rapid headway in the wooded Ardennes. But the Christmas spirit was there, too. We exchanged gifts with Mr. and Mrs. Ronckers, Eleanor, Mrs. Prins, and Father Heynen. We drank old wine, champagne, and American scotch.

Across the street, in St. Julia's School, there was a party. The soldiers were exchanging gifts with the nuns, some girls, and the children. Emmerich and Rodrigue were there; so were Johnson, Campbell, Laughon, Tyson, Edwards, Babcock, and a number of other headquarters men. They had a gay time.

After mass in the chapel that morning, Donovan and I were invited to the nuns' reception room for a little gathering. Sister Irene was there, and acted as interpreter for the sisters who couldn't speak English. We liked her very much. The nuns had prepared a whole table full of presents.

Sister Irene picked up one of the gifts and said, "This first package is for you, Captain. We wish you a happy Christmas, and hope that by next year you will be back in your country with your family and loved ones."

Then she turned to Donovan, Emmerich, and the others, giving them each a present. We had brought gifts for them too.



Burial service at Henri Chapelle, Belgium.

Afterward, we sang Christmas carols and "God Bless America." The sisters sang several of their native songs, and ended with the Limburg Song, a stirring, patriotic air of the province. It was a grand Christmas day.

When I returned to the office, I saw General Patton's message on my desk and had several copies made for the bulletin boards. It was a beautiful message; I read it to the men during Christmas dinner.

"Almighty and most merciful Father, we humbly beseech Thee, of Thy great goodness, to restrain these immoderate rains with which we have had to contend. Grant us fair weather for Battle. Graciously hearken to us as soldiers who call upon Thee that armed with Thy power, we may advance from victory to victory, and crush the oppression and wickedness of our enemies, and establish Thy justice among men and nations. Amen."

With Christmas over, the thoughts of Bastogne came to us once more. More bodies arrived at our cemetery, some from the Bulge. Most of the dead, however, went to Henri Chapelle, below Aachen, in the First Army sector. There the 607th Graves Registration Company worked day and night. Some days they had as many as five hundred bodies to bury. In spite of the mud and a poor place to work, they were very efficient and did a superb job. They were an old outfit, with lots of experience, and showed it in their work.

## Bastogne and "Nuts!"

The situation was getting worse. Captain Pearson, of the 607th, was worried for fear he might have to abandon his big cemetery at Henri Chapelle. In Bastogne, the encircled 101st



Airborne, with elements of the 10th Armored Division, held out against repeated attacks by the Germans. Patton was in the south, and came roaring northward with his armored divisions, attacking the enemy with the III and XII Corps. In one day, General Patton moved his 5th Division, which was fighting in the Saar, north to the Sauer River, a distance of sixty-nine miles. General Marshall says that "this shift from an offensive across the Saar to a general attack in southern Luxembourg was a brilliant military accomplishment, including corps and army staff work of the highest order."

In the center, General Hodges was still fighting back. His Army was hit hard but not wiped out by any means. He began a general counterattack all along the northern salient, holding off Rundstedt's men everywhere. The split command between Marshal Montgomery and General Bradley worked well. Rundstedt could move only in the center. He did — to Celles and the Meuse.

Meanwhile, the besieged defenders of Bastogne received continual orders to surrender. The acting commander of the 101st Airborne, in the absence of their regular commanding general, merely replied, "Nuts!" to a German ultimatum to surrender. This statement by Brigadier General Anthony C. McAuliffe echoed all over the world, and earned the entire division a Distinguished Unit Citation. Yes, these men of the 101st, with the screaming eagle insignia, earned the world's gratitude. Their record from D-day to Bastogne prompted a British corps commander to say, "I have commanded four corps during my army career, but the 101st Airborne Division is the fightingest outfit I ever had under my command."

When McAuliffe's men refused to surrender, the Germans



charged at the paratroopers and tried desperately to break the ring around Bastogne. On December 26, the 4th Armored Division came charging north, crying, "Hot damn — here's the 4th Armored! Boys, we're coming. Hold! Hold!" The 101st held, and were soon freed by the "Breakthrough Division."

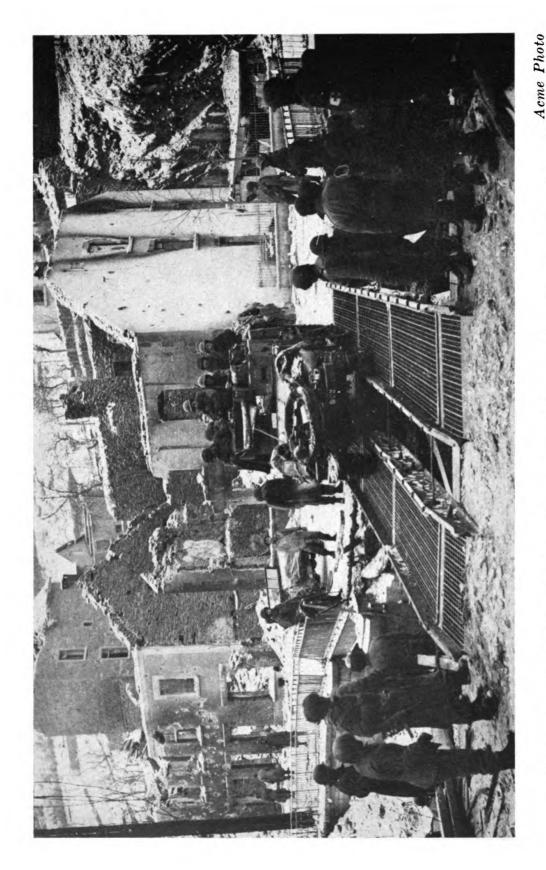
With the relief of Bastogne, the Ardennes crisis had passed and the Allies began assaulting the German lines everywhere in the north, south, and west. Hitler, back in Berlin, was amazed when the "fool Americans" refused to quit. When he learned that his Ardennes counteroffensive was failing, he was furious; he summoned his closest aides and reiterated the order to hurl the invaders back from the Rhine and Oder.

Hitler was raging mad, and began to take larger and larger doses of morphine. The Russians were coming in the east; his western wall was crumbling; the skies over Berlin were filled with British night-raiders and American daylight bombers. Schicklgruber was plainly nervous. He had aged considerably since his blitzkrieg days in 1940 and was obviously in poor health. He coughed a great deal when he spoke, and frequently had to stop completely until the pains left his chest. Eva Braun was with him constantly and looked after him like a mother. She pitied Adolf for his recurring misfortunes, but assured him that the day would come when the world would know his greatness. She possessed an indomitable faith in her Fuehrer.

## The Battle of the Bulge

On December 26, 1944, the Germans were driven out of Celles, near the Meuse River; they never got beyond this point in Belgium. The reduction of the salient in the Ardennes





Acme Photo First and Third U. S. Armies join at Houffalize during the Battle of the Bulge.

involved most of the First and Third American Armies and British XXX Corps. Early in January, in zero weather, the 21st Army Group launched a powerful offensive on the northern flank and kept reducing the salient until the capture of Houffalize. This Belgian town was a stronghold, and was all but wiped out in a vicious struggle with the Germans. It was strategically located in a deep valley in the mountains and commanded several important crossroads over which German supply columns passed to the front. Bastogne was heavily hit and about half the city was destroyed, but the destruction did not compare to that inflicted on Houffalize.

When the weather finally cleared over the Ardennes, our Air Force began to pound Rundstedt's supply columns and stalled armor. On the first of January, 125 German aircraft were destroyed over the Bulge.

With Bastogne relieved, Captain Pearson of the 607th breathed more easily; he would not have to abandon his cemetery at Henri Chapelle. The 606th went to work picking up the dead in the freed areas of the Ardennes and found many thousands. They kept Pearson busy night and day. The cemetery grew until it was necessary to open up new plots across the road. It was an undesirable territory, but it couldn't be helped — the dead had to be buried. When I visited Pearson, he told me that they were running out of graves and that they had already buried more than 15,000 men at Henri Chapelle.

In the north, General Simpson of the Ninth Army played his divisions like chessmen. He rushed the 84th Infantry to Marche; he held the 104th near Duren, the 102nd near the Roer, the 29th at Julich, and sent the 5th Armored racing here and there to confuse the Germans. Montgomery's XXX Corps had



swung around Namur and prevented the enemy from crossing the Meuse. The northern salient was finally secured and the gradual reduction of German lines began.

The skies over the Ardennes stayed clear in mid-January; American and British Air Forces had a heyday. They pounded Rundstedt mercilessly — his tanks, his supplies, his men. Great fleets of B-17's, B-24's, fighter planes and interceptors kept coming in huge waves, leaving the Germans helpless and disabled. In the south, Patton rapidly moved his divisions here and there — he was a terror to the enemy. The American Seventh Army, with the French First Army, pushed hard in the Vosges. When German patrols were driven out of Celles, near the Meuse, the enemy began a slow and gradual withdrawal from the Ardennes.

Hitler's biggest gamble had become his worst defeat. Still he felt that Germany was not lost. More than seventy divisions could be rushed to hold the Rhine; others would hold the Russians at the Oder. Germany must not capitulate; the struggle must go on. Hitler hoped the Allies would start quarreling among themselves; then he could form a treaty to end hostilities. At least it would halt the bombing of Berlin, his beloved capital.

At the German Chancellery, lights were burning all through the long night. The Fuehrer paced the floor steadily, talking to few people, seeing only his most trusted advisors — Goering, Himmler, Goebbels, Eva Braun, and his personal physician. The morphine was telling on him heavily; the painful headaches would vanish, only to come back sharply within a few hours. Hitler did most of his planning during the quiet hours of the night when his doped brain was keen and clear. But his great hopes were vanishing; the Third Reich was



crumbling at his feet, crumbling in the east and the west under the onslaught of the Allies.

#### More Crosses

Back in Margraten, our cemetery was growing fast. No longer were ten acres adequate for our ever-increasing number of burial plots; we needed twenty acres, thirty, possibly more. We needed more help; soon another colored company arrived to help dig graves. The days were bitter cold and the ground froze solid, making it difficult to break through the crust. The open graves were equally hard to cover up; the fresh dirt froze into solid masses that were difficult to pry loose. Our troops worked hard, frequently without adequate footgear or warm clothing. We began to salvage overshoes from the dead. We kept what we needed; then sent truckload after truckload to Quartermaster Salvage Collecting Companies for reissue to combat troops.

Searching the bodies on the stripping line was now a difficult task. The corpses were frozen stiff and it was extremely hard to get into the pockets to remove all the personal effects. On occasions it was necessary to move the bodies into our morgue tent and thaw them out, so we could work on them and loosen all joints for their subsequent burial. When unknowns were discovered, we had a difficult time with fingerprinting. Sometimes we had to excise the skin from the ball of each finger to obtain a satisfactory imprint on our Report of Burial and Inventory of Personal Effects.

The medical sergeants, who did the stripping on the line at the receiving platforms, earned the respect of everyone who saw them perform their unpleasant task. They could seldom



work with gloves, which were cumbersome; thus they were constantly exposed to infection. It was hard to keep everything sterile at the cemetery during freezing weather. The men just warmed their hands by the fire and went right back to work on the frozen bodies, cutting open all pockets, searching for all possible identification clues, and removing all the personal effects. The clerk who worked with each medical sergeant took down all the essential information, then rushed over to the personal effects tent where the official paper work on burial and personal effects was really begun.

Here in the tent, all forms were stamped with the identification tag by means of an addressograph; then one tag was put back on the body and one was tacked to the cross. To prevent loss of the identification tag buried with the body, the sergeants usually put it in the corpse's mouth. We knew that someday the remains might have to be reidentified or reinterred; this tag would serve as a valuable cross check.

With unknowns the procedure was a little more complicated. A metallic plate had to be prepared, one for the body and another for the cross. Usually, duplicate papers showing all possible clues to identity went into a burial bottle, which was interred with the remains. The grave was given an X assignment, which meant that, at the time of burial, the body was either completely unknown or sufficient evidence was lacking to positively establish identity. Needless to say, many of the X numbers were later identified and a second set of papers rushed through on the burial.

The Dutch winds continued to lash our cemetery with undiminishing fury. Our tents ripped, blew down, and often burned. The snow piled up and made traveling easier. No





Personal effects tent.

Ninth Army Photo



more was it necessary to slosh through deep mud and ooze; instead, we had a hard frozen surface to walk on. Usually, the snow blew away from the cemetery and piled up high in the lowlands on either side of us. The crosses were frozen solid in the ground, and we had to abandon our alignment operations altogether. Over fresh graves we simply inserted the crosses any which way, just so long as they were over the correct graves. We could straighten and align them when the ground thawed in the spring. Our flag, with its tattered edges and earthy color, testified to many weeks of bad weather and continuous death. When we raised a new flag on the tall spruce pole, a new spirit seemed to breathe over Margraten.

### Bastogne to Bitburg

The Ardennes salient was practically reduced when the 21st Army Group in the north and Patton's pressure in the south forced the Germans to abandon St. Vith, enabling American troops to cross the Belgian-German frontier near Prum. General Marshall in his report, Winning the War in Europe and in the Pacific, states that: "The reduction of the Ardennes salient involved our First and Third Armies in heavy fighting under severe winter conditions, but progress was steady and by the end of January the Bulge was eliminated at a cost which later proved fatal to the enemy. In the single day of 22 January, the air force destroyed or damaged more than 4,192 pieces of heavy equipment, including locomotives, rail cars, tanks, and motor and horse-drawn vehicles.

"The Germans gained an initial tactical success and imposed a delay of about six weeks on the main Allied offensive in the north, but failed to seize their primary objectives of



Liège and Namur. They lost 220,000 men, including 110,000 prisoners, and more than 1,400 tanks and assault guns."

With the Ardennes counteroffensive smashed, the Germans were unable to forestall an American and British breakthrough to the plains west of the Rhine River. The Nazis still held substantial reserves here, and the Allied plan was to annihilate or capture them before they could flee across the river. In early February, at the ARGONAUT Conference at Yalta, President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and Marshal Stalin approved the plan for the destruction of the enemy forces west of the Rhine and subsequent coordinated moves into the heart of Germany. Following this conference, three Allied Armies smashed into the Cologne Plain. In the north, Cleve and Goch were taken by the 21st Army Group; the First Army crossed the Roer; the Third Army took Bitburg, crossed the Saar River near Saarburg, and raced on toward Oppenheim.

#### The Race to the Rhine

Destruction of the enemy forces west of the Rhine River was brilliantly planned and executed by General Eisenhower. The First Canadian Army rushed from Nijmegen along the watershed between the Meuse and the Rhine; the Ninth Army surged from the Roer River toward Düsseldorf. Tactical and Strategic Air Forces flew nearly 10,000 sorties to help the drive. The First Army took the ruins of Cologne, and the Third Army drove across the Our and Sauer Rivers. The American Seventh Army from the south and the First French Army charged eastward in the general direction of Kaiserlautern and Mulhouse. This was the drive to envelop and destroy the enemy west of the Rhine.



The First Army was now in Cologne. Elements of its 9th Armored Division, probing the Rhine farther south, discovered the important Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen intact, and raced across to establish a bridgehead on the other side. The First Army was the first to cross the Rhine, but Simpson's Ninth Army was the first to reach the river in force. The capture of the Remagen bridge was a daring exploit, and prompted General Smith to say, "While the bridge lasted, it was worth its weight in gold." Several divisions were rushed across and helped to exploit a powerful bridgehead, which later proved disastrous to the enemy. Despite savage and repeated counterattacks, the Nazis were unable to hold off the American forces and were soon enveloped by the First and Third Armies.

The daring capture of the Ludendorff Bridge enabled Patton to crush the Germans north of the Moselle, and opened the way for his armored columns. Soon the entire Rhine River front was in Allied hands, from Nijmegen in the north to Koblenz in the south.

### The Watch on the Rhine

When the Ninth Army reached the Rhine, there was a sudden period of quiescence on the western front. General Simpson awarded our company the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque for outstanding work in graves registration activities with the Ninth Army. We were privileged to wear the insignia, a golden wreath on a light green field, on our right sleeve. The 3136th Quartermaster Service Company assisting us with burial was similarly awarded the Plaque.

As American troops advanced to the Rhine, I received orders from the Ninth Army to move the third platoon to



Germany for possible extended operations. I was surprised, as there was an understanding that no American soldiers would be buried in Germany. I consulted Captain Bailey, Graves Registration Officer at Maastricht.

"Captain," he said, "the First and Ninth Armies have an agreement that no Americans will be buried on German soil unless tactically it becomes impossible to bring the dead back for burial on Allied soil. This move is precautionary — we expect the big jump to take place soon. You'll have to send Williams somewhere close to the Rhine, where we will be able to use him if the situation up there gets out of hand. Remember — he is to bury enemy dead only. We'll shuttle the Americans back to Margraten. I'm trying to convince the Old Man that we can handle everything at Margraten. We'll establish Army Transfer Points midway between the cemetery and the Rhine."

"What about the service troops . . . who's going to work with Williams?" Bailey said that it would be necessary to send one platoon of colored troops along. They were to wait until the Rhine was crossed; as soon as it was safe, Williams would go over and establish a temporary German cemetery on the other side of the river.

With this in mind, I made a hurried reconnaissance trip to the Rhine, searching for a spot that would be suitable for a cemetery site. Bailey wanted me to cover an area in northeastern Holland around Venlo, trying to locate a site closer to the river than Margraten. I covered every square mile of territory around Venlo, München-Gladbach, and Roermond, and reported several excellent spots. However, Ninth Army gave up the whole idea and went back to our regular routine.

In mid-March we moved the third platoon to Neukirchen,



Germany, and billeted the men in an abandoned army hospital. The building was partially occupied by an American artillery unit that was making reconnaissance flights over the Rhine in Piper Cubs. Their airfield was going to be our new cemetery site, if and when it was necessary to open a cemetery west of the Rhine.

Meanwhile, the second platoon under Lt. Zajicek was moved up to Krefeld, Germany, and assigned to the 84th Infantry, the (Rail-Splitters) Division, that had taken Geilenkirchen, Suggerath, Lindern, and Beeck. One of the colonels said, "There's the best damn G. R. outfit on the western front. I wouldn't trade Zajicek and his platoon for all the Q. M. men in Ninth Army!"

Zeke just smiled sheepishly and said, "You'll be sor-ry, Colonel."

The men lived in a beautiful district on the outskirts of the bombed city. Zeke took me to his quarters, a beautiful palatial home, where he lived with several other officers. Each had a room to himself; they had beer, fresh toast, pretzels, and German women to do the cleaning.

Meanwhile, Schreiber, the fourth platoon commander, was operating a collecting point for the 102nd Infantry Division, and moving from place to place. During the Roer River campaign, he worked at Herzogenrath, Heerlen, Erkelenz, and Baal. Now he was to be located between Margraten and the Rhine, operating the first Army Graves Registration Transfer Point. Before Schreiber left the 102nd, he was presented with the Bronze Star for exceptional and meritorious services with the "Hillbillies," as they were often called, during the hectic days around the Roer River. The 102nd took Krefeld, a key railroad



and communications center just west of the Rhine. Now they were watching, waiting, storing supplies in caverns and caves until they were ready to cross the river.

Zeke and Schreiber were doing an excellent job; so were their men. And they weren't the only ones. There was Williams and the third platoon, Jensen and the first; men like Smith, Dunn, Parish, Belshe, Zinzi. In Headquarters were Donovan, Emmerich, Johnson, Ray, Campbell, Rodrigue, Brennan, Beck. There were others — Kammerer, Foote, Martinez, Ruiz, Browning, Maxwell, Jeffries, Fife, Stone, Kocon, Riggins, Lowe, Dorney, Barr, Ames, Yrjanson, White, Cibulka, Meyers, and Bandy. In other units were well-known names — Wilson, Crossley, Frost, McKinven of the 606th; McKinven, Pearson, Sloane, and Sweeney of the 607th; Fischer, Abar, Plonk, Wilder, Solms, Lynch, Bailey, Mullins, and Bobrink. All graves registration men were doing a hard, wearisome and unpleasant job — and doing it well.

# The Jump-Off

Williams was very comfortably situated at Neukirchen. He had more rooms in the hospital than he knew what to do with. There was a large kitchen with gas heat, stoves, refrigerator, and other modern equipment. The platoon had only twenty-four enlisted men and worked as a single detachment, a separate entity. The independence that the small unit had, more than made up for any other privileges that may have been lacking. The men enjoyed working alone and protested against returning to Margraten.

The cemetery site at Neukirchen was beautiful. It was level as a table, free of rock and water, and commanded a



beautiful view of the Rhineland for miles around. I hoped that we could open a German cemetery here. One day when I paid my regular weekly visit, Williams asked for Laughon, the surveyor, to come up and stake out the cemetery, as the crossing of the river seemed imminent.

The artillery unit, with its radios and cub planes, was still here, and made constant flights to report any evidence of German activity. Late that afternoon they received a message to "cut loose with a thousand rounds" of something. We wondered what it was all about; perhaps this would be the crossing. Then darkness came over the Rhineland. Stars were out, the night was warm and refreshing. Everything was still — not a light could be seen anywhere. Yet death and destruction were hidden in the woods, in fields, in orchards for miles around.

About 2:30 A. M. I was awakened by a tremendous roar of artillery. The building shook as flashes from the powerful guns lit up the entire countryside. I dressed and went out on the porch; most of the men were already there, watching the spectacle. Here was a grand display of fireworks — not since El Alamein had there been such an exhibition. More than 1,250 guns, ranging from small artillery pieces to giant long toms, 155's, 240's, and 8-inch howitzers, cut loose with a terrible vengeance, a bombardment so overwhelming that we had to shield our eyes and open our mouths to absorb the pressure on our eardrums. Most of the guns, from the British and Canadian in the north to our own in the south, were spread out on a plain, so that their flashes were plainly visible from one end of the line to the other.

The barrage lasted about two hours; then came daylight and the immediate crossing of the Rhine by foot troops. Pontoon



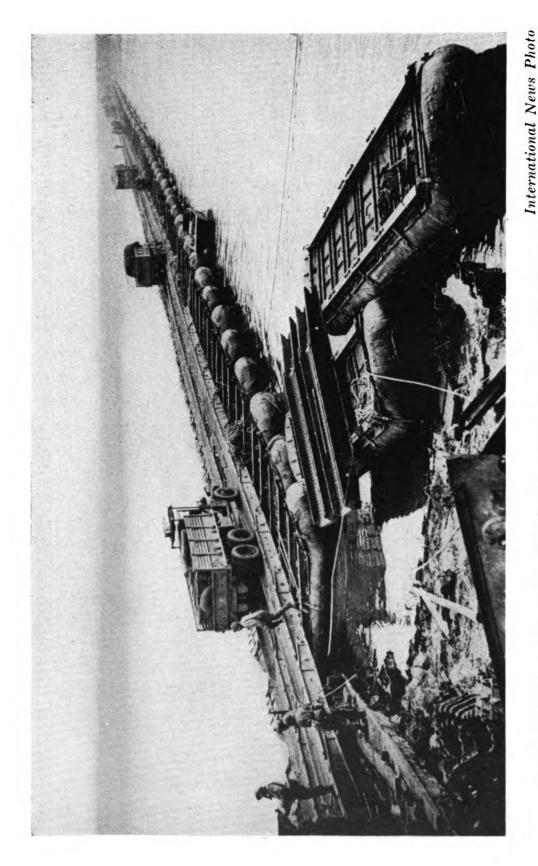
bridges were quickly strung across the river by our engineers; and within a few hours, trucks and tanks were rolling over them to the battered banks on the other side. The performance of the engineers was brilliant. Those of the VII Corps laid a Treadway bridge across the Rhine in exactly ten hours and eleven minutes.

Soon after sunrise, the First Allied Airborne Army, consisting mainly of the American 17th and the British 6th Divisions, dropped in pockets north and northeast of Wesel, just above Duisburg, across the Rhine. More than 3,000 gliders were used, without a single loss due directly to enemy action. This dramatic thrust, although not so costly in aircraft, was heavily paid for by the men. Glider pilots and paratroopers made their descent right into a host of German anti-aircraft guns and were picked off like pigeons coming in for a landing. No one could better understand the terrible cost in human life of this operation than we who were on hand to pick up the dead and transport them back to Holland for burial. General Eisenhower, in a letter, said that losses to ground troops on the Ninth Army front were meagre — "15 in one assault division and 16 in the other." Most of our dead at Margraten were airborne troops and their horrible condition showed it plainly.

Two days after the Rhine crossing, we ran out of graves at our cemetery. I appealed to Ninth Army for help but received no satisfactory response. Perplexed and desperate, I turned to Burgomaster Ronckers.

"Can you help us? We need men. We need men with shovels. Can you issue a call to all able-bodied men of Margraten to report to the cemetery at once? We have more than a thousand bodies that must be buried!"





International News Photo Pontoon bridge, the work of U. S. Army engineers, spans the Rhine River during the historic crossing.

Digitized by Google

The Burgomaster took off like a shot for the town hall. "Just leave it to me, Captain," he called, "just leave it to me. The men will be there!"

In two days the thousand dead were buried and we had more than enough fresh graves open to put us back on a normal schedule. All of us were tired from digging. One colored chap dug a grave in fifty-five minutes; it took me ninety-five. All the graves were regulation size — five feet deep, two feet wide, six and one-half feet long.

Back at Henri Chapelle, the big First Army cemetery was closing. Nearly 17,000 Americans were laid to rest, mostly by the 607th Graves Registration Company, a unit which probably buried more dead in Europe than any other quartermaster company. It was my old outfit and I always felt close to them.

First Army was now burying the dead in Germany — American dead. We were disappointed — our agreement had apparently meant nothing. We knew that as soon as the war was over, the bodies would have to be disinterred and moved back to Allied soil. We felt that the people back home would not want their sons buried in Germany. Yet, in spite of all the bickering, all our Armies, except the Ninth, quickly opened up cemeteries in Germany. It was proven that American dead could be transported back to friendly soil without much extra trouble or the use of much more equipment. It was done in Ninth Army area, when we hauled the dead nearly 400 miles from across the Elbe back to Margraten.

When the airborne troops settled down east of Wesel, they firmly established footholds on the north side of the Wesel-Munster highway. They enlarged their holdings until they joined up with other units, including foot troops who were just



coming from the Rhine. Many units landed intact, and held large areas until they were met by advancing infantry or armor. One outfit, an airborne unit led by a first sergeant, Jack Epting of Atlanta, landed fifty men safely and collected more than thirty gliders in their area, lining them up for eventual tow back to France. Epting showed the stamina, courage and audacity characteristic of the men making up the First Allied Airborne Army.

The crossing of the Rhine by five Allied Armies shattered the entire German defense line and caused the enemy to gradually retreat from the Palatinate, the Saar, and areas to the north. Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig and Munich were in danger. Germany was near collapse.

# The Surge into Germany

By the end of March, the Remagen bridgehead had been extended to a depth of more than ten miles and a breadth of thirty miles. General Hodges broke out of the bridgehead, racing for Limburg and Frankfort. Hitler, expecting a big attack on the Ruhr, ordered strong forces from Army Group B north of the Sieg River. Patton charged at breakneck speed to the Mainz, crossed the river, and swung on toward Frankfort. Marshal Montgomery, commanding the Northern Army Group which included the Ninth Army, tore into the northwest section of the Ruhr. Other units swung east to Hamburg, the Elbe and Wittenberge. In the extreme south, General Devers' forces leaped across the Rhine and made straight for Mannheim; the French, meanwhile, crossed near Germersheim and made contact with the American Seventh Army. Our Fifteenth Army, under the command of Lieutenant General Gerow, helped to



hold the Ruhr pocket, enabling the First and Ninth Armies to crash deeper and deeper into the heart of Germany.

On March 30, our second platoon, operating with the 84th Division at Krefeld, was assigned a dual mission. Zeke and eight men were assigned to the 5th Armored Division; the remainder of the platoon under S/Sgt. Eichmeier stayed with the 84th.

The 5th Armored assignment proved to be something new in graves registration procedure. This division, with many men missing in action in previous commitments, decided to put experienced graves registration personnel with front line elements as well as with the Quartermaster. Four men — Austin, Clark, Pergakis and Martinez — were attached to Combat Command R to identify casualties at the scene of action and to accompany the unit in its spearheading mission across Germany. Zajicek, Strok, Martino and Morris remained with the Division Quartermaster.

On March 31, Combat Command R crossed the Rhine at Wesel and struck east toward central Germany. It by-passed the 17th Airborne Division and headed for Munster; then it continued southeast to the Autobahn Highway, through Hereford, Exeter, to Hehenaussen. Little resistance was encountered. Here Thomas and Strok, who had replaced Clark three days earlier, returned to the Division Quartermaster, leaving Austin, Pergakis and Martinez with the Combat Command. These three, armed with only carbines and automatic pistols, captured six German soldiers who were trying to escape through the lines in an ambulance. The captured enemy vehicle was quickly put to better use.

The spearheading continued across the Hanoverian Plain,



through Peine and Bedeln. Resistance was light, although there was intermittent enemy artillery fire and strafing by enemy aircraft. Leaving Bedeln, the column was shelled for forty minutes. Several tanks were destroyed in this encounter; the casualties, five tankmen, were identified and placed into Austin's truck. A few days later, as the column neared the Elbe near Wittenberge, the enemy demolished all bridges across the river, halting the Combat Command only forty-three miles from Berlin.

Approximately a week later, these troops, with the rest of the division, withdrew to a rest area; the three graves registration men were released back to the Division Quartermaster. They had been in combat with front line elements for twenty consecutive days, and handled all of the Command's casualties without a single unknown. During their exciting journey, these men captured a total of eighteen Germans and killed many others.

In the meantime, Lt. Zajicek received orders to "maintain close liaison between Combat Command R and the Division Quartermaster." This necessitated many trips between the two units, often in dangerous territory. But Zeke was calm, and never got excited over anything except his falling hair. One day he and his driver were carrying bodies back from the Command when they came to a small column of American vehicles. When he tried to pass them, he discovered they were full of Germans.

"Halt!" cried one of the Nazis. "Giff us you guns, you trucks. Eh... vot is dis!" He had uncovered Zeke's trailer and glanced inside. "Pfew! You, Lootenant... you bury dees bodies—quick! Get shovel and dig. Now!"



Zeke and his driver took the shovels and buried their comrades. The Germans searched the men and herded them into a truck with twenty other GI's. They took them to a field and locked them in a barn. Here was another group of American prisoners — about 150 of them. The Germans spotted machine guns all around the barn and threatened to burn it to the ground if any of the men tried to escape. For food, the prisoners had soup three times a day, cooked by the local farmers. During the night, the roar of tanks was heard on the highway. The Germans grew nervous and wanted to fire the barn.

A Nazi captain walked in and said, "You Americans stay here until morning. Do not move or try to escape in the night or ve vill burn dis barn down. I varn you — it vill be death. If in the morning you don't see us, den you are free."

The next morning Zeke and the other prisoners were free. He was nervous, lost more hair, but recovered from the ordeal. We never found his vehicle and trailer, and wrote it off our books by a Report of Survey.

# Voerde Cemetery

When the Rhine was successfully crossed at Wesel, Williams and his third platoon moved across the river and established a cemetery for enemy dead near Voerde. It was a bad area, although the ground was good and permitted easy digging. Still, approach to the cemetery was difficult because of the heavy destruction from the artillery barrage. We hoped to turn it over to another unit, if we could only find one.

The men were billeted in two homes, both bombed heavily, but livable. I saw them a few days after the crossing and they were having a gay time racing around in a German motorcycle.



They used it for official business, making runs from their headquarters to the cemetery.

One platoon of the 3136th Service Company was with Williams and liked the new setup much better than their stuffy apple house in Margraten. They didn't want to go back; they asked where our next cemetery was going to be and if we would take them along. I said that as long as they did a good job for Williams, we would keep them as our service troops. The two units got along splendidly.

Meanwhile, the fourth platoon was ordered to leave the 102nd Division, reverted to Army control, and was sent forward to Senden to establish and operate a collecting point for the Army. The plan was to shuttle bodies back to Williams, who, in turn, would load them on his trucks and bring them back to Margraten. The system worked well. Our only difficulty was shortage of labor and trucks. As a result, we had to use two-and-a-half-ton trucks and trailers, and make as few trips as possible. Sometimes the trucks made the 150-mile haul overnight, pulling into Margraten in the morning. There were as many as eighty bodies in the trucks, and thirty-five more in the trailers. This was not the rule, however; usually a three-quarter-ton truck carried troops and the one-ton attached trailer carried bodies. On the Ninth Army front, two-and-a-half-ton trucks were used only during the battle of Germany.

## Senne Cemetery

After several weeks of operation, Williams turned over Voerde to a new company, fresh from its training in England. He went to our new cemetery site at Senne I (there were two Sennes close together). Here was a big field, level as a table



top, with soil that cut like butter. It was a beautiful place, on the outskirts of town, with fine spruce trees bordering the field in every direction. The German civilians who lived in pretty homes nearby wanted to know all about our work, our operations, and the peculiar trucks that were pulling into their village. They soon found out.

We picked the finest home for Williams and ordered the German family to leave. They wanted time to move all their furniture out of the house, but we gave them only three hours. Captain Solms, with the colored detachment, did the same thing. He picked three consecutive homes and ordered his men to move in.

Schreiber soon moved down to operate a transfer point and assist Williams. He took quarters in a German tavern and ordered the proprietor to get a wagonload of beer. The Nazi obliged, and the fourth platoon had all the beer it could drink during its remaining days at Senne.

## The Last of Schicklgruber

With the Allies closing in on Berlin, Hitler grew desperate. The Ruhr pocket was closed. Elements of eighteen German divisions from the First Parachute, Fifth Panzer and the Fifteenth Armies were hemmed in. The American First Army was approaching a juncture with the Russians on the line of the Elbe-Mulde near Torgau. The British were advancing on Osnabruck-Bremen and Hamburg; the Canadians were liberating Holland. Far to the south, the Third Army was racing for Czechoslovakia and the Danube Valley; the Seventh Army captured Nürnberg and swung out on the Bavarian Plain. Munich fell, the birthplace of Hitler's party. Some elements



of the Seventh Army headed for Austria; some swung south to establish contact with the Fifth Army in the Brenner Pass at Vipeteno. The French, under De Tassigny, were in Strasburg and the Black Forest. Hitler's swastika was being torn into shreds.

Adolf, the great dreamer, fanatic, dope fiend, and now raving maniac, began quarreling with Goering, Jodl, Himmler, Goebbels. On April 16, he issued a General Order to the German people, dividing the country into two defense zones. He himself would command the North Defense; his SS Chief and Minister of the Interior, Heinrich Himmler, would have the South Defense Command. In the south, there was still hope for guerilla warfare. In this area, the "National Redoubt," fanatical Nazis could carry on their fight, their war of nerves. Three days later, Hitler issued another General Order, calling for all his leaders to concentrate on the Allies' weak points and wage small-scale warfare.

"This cannot be happening!" he screamed. "People of Germany, rush to the defense of your Fatherland! Your Fuehrer will command you to victory. I promise you the life blood of our invaders. Hurl them back, for the Cause of Germany must live! Come forward from your homes, your stables, your hiding places, come out to meet our enemies. Kill every soldier, kill these beasts wherever you find them. Burn their tanks, their trucks, their equipment. Defeat the invader! Defeat him in the name of your Fuehrer!"

But the situation grew worse. When the American 69th Infantry Division made contact with the First Ukranian Army on the banks of the Elbe, Himmler left his South Defense Command, carrying cyanide. Through Count Folke Bernadotte of



Sweden, he appealed to the United States and Britain for separate peace terms.

When Hitler learned of Himmler's treason to the Third Reich, he nearly collapsed. He called in Admiral Doenitz and sat in secret conference with him for many hours. The world may never know what took place behind those doors in crumbling Berlin. Many have advanced the theory that Hitler planned an escape to a foreign country. He could get two bodies, one to resemble Eva Braun, the other himself; he could saturate them with gasoline and burn them beneath the ruins of Berlin. In a super plane he could escape with his most trusted aides — Eva, the doctors and nurses. They could fly to Tokyo, to Argentina, without refueling. Then he would remove his heavy bullet-proof cap, his steel-lined suit; he would change his nose (Eva did not like it anyway), his face, his whole appearance. The escape would be simple, the transformation complete.

On May 1, 1945, Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz announced to the German people that Adolf Hitler had died, and that he was named as Fuehrer. Surrender negotiations began immediately. A week later, in a small schoolhouse in Reims, Colonel General Alfred Jodl, Chief of Staff of the Wehrmacht, signed the act of surrender for the German Army. Next day, in Berlin, a second act of surrender was signed by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, surrendering to the Allies all land, sea, and air forces of the Reich.



### VII

### MEMORIAL SERVICES

### V-E Day in Margraten

When the war ended in Europe, Margraten, like so many other villages, went wild. A holiday was proclaimed by the Burgomaster and the little Dutch hamlet celebrated for two whole days. Now the people could dance; now they could have their festivals, their carnivals, their merry-making weekends. The children, dressed in their finest clothes, went visiting from house to house. The grownups went to church; they came to the cemetery, bringing flowers and flags. They came with thankfulness in their hearts and a prayer on their lips.

A group of us celebrated in the Ronckers home. We sang old songs—American and Dutch songs, the French Marsellaise. Mrs. Ronckers made pie and tea; Brennan brought meat from our kitchen and pastry from his locker. Many men from our company came to pay their respects to the Burgomaster and his wife. I opened my last bottle of champagne. Mr. and Mrs. Ronckers, Father Heynen, Eleanor, Mrs. Prins, Emmerich, Johnson, Campbell, Laughon, Rodrigue, Donovan—all of us drank a toast: "Here's to victory in Europe—may the war end soon in the Pacific. God bless the Allies and our good friends here in Margraten and the world over."



I issued passes, many passes. We closed the cemetery for the day, closed our Operations Section in the girls' school. For one time, for the first time, we would stop work and celebrate the victory in Europe.

Next day, Margraten was still celebrating, still drinking, still dancing and parading. We, on the other hand, were back at work at the cemetery. Bodies had piled up during the night and the previous day; Emmerich and Donovan had their hands full. Johnson had hundreds of dollars to take to the Army Finance Officer at Liège — money taken from the deceased to be turned over to the next of kin. This was his three hundredth trip; he had turned over nearly a half a million dollars. Of this money, not one copper cent was ever mislaid, improperly removed, or stolen from our dead comrades.

In Germany the other three platoons celebrated victory quietly. Schreiber and his unit drank beer; Williams and the third platoon stayed on at Senne and celebrated with steak and scotch. Across the Elbe, Zeke's unit was split up once more, furnishing graves registration service for the XVIII Airborne Corps, the 82nd Airborne Division and the 8th Division.

## Ludwigslust

In Ludwigslust, near the Elbe River, Zeke discovered the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp. This camp was similar to Buchenwald, Dachau and others. There were many American dead; others were still living but were veritable skeletons. Most of the prisoners were Poles, French, Czechs and Russians. The dead were in bad shape and could not be readily identified; in fact, it was necessary to bury most of them right in Ludwigslust. Identified Americans and Allies were wrapped in blankets and



sent to Margraten; the hundreds of others were buried in the front church yard in the city. The people dug the graves, supervised by the mayor. Women were made to take sheets from their own beds and soap from their kitchens to bathe and wrap the naked bodies before burial. The American paratroopers and infantry were so incensed at the whole ghastly spectacle that they allowed the civilians no mercy, and made them work on their knees until all the unfortunate victims were buried.

The remains that were sent to Margraten were typical examples of Nazi brutality. My men and I will never be able to forget the sight of those bodies which we laid to rest in the holy soil of Margraten; neither can we forget the inhuman treatment of our enemies who put them there.

After Ludwigslust, Zeke — the officer involved over a can of jam in England, the man who that colonel had said would steal from the dead — was sent on an extraordinary mission to Weimar, to act as principal coordinator in graves registration work between two of America's largest Armies, the First and Ninth. To the last, Zeke remained a hard-working, loyal and fearless officer, fighting for the right to keep American dead out of Germany and instituting plans to remove the dead from enemy soil, once he saw that many Americans were buried there. He earned the love and respect of four Armies in Europe and, I am sure, the everlasting gratitude of the American people.

## The Cemetery Committee

The cemetery at Margraten could not have developed from a turnip field into a vast burial ground, were it not for a handful of energetic men — of honesty, sincerity, and far-sightedness. This group was to become known all over Holland to thousands



of families in the United States. It was formed in February, 1945, when we held a meeting of citizens at the mayor's home, to discuss plans for beautifying the cemetery, control of civilian traffic, adoption of graves, and flowers for the coming Memorial Day services.

I remember the first meeting well. Mrs. Ronckers cooked dinner, aided by Brennan's contribution of meat, flour, sugar, coffee, and other items. We gathered around the table and drank a toast: "Here's to the success of the new committee and the work it is about to undertake." Spread out before us was boiled mountain trout, egg salad, potato salad, cold meats, wine, and American scotch. We started with soup and ended with pie, pudding and coffee. It was a grand meal.

When the meeting was over, Burgomaster Ronckers was elected Honorary President; Harry Sluysmans, President; Arthur Sluysmans, Secretary; Harry Brewers, Treasurer; Joseph van Laar, Interpreter; Frank Fryns and Guillaume Schrews, members. Of course, Father Heynen worked with them, too. The group became known as the Civilian Committee of Margraten.

The Committee met frequently after that and we made considerable progress. The Ninth Army had vague plans for a Memorial Day Service and wanted the cemetery in as good a condition as possible. Our graves were partly mounded, and I promised to have them all uniform by that time. The mounding was to take care of the settling of soil and to eliminate the necessity for bringing in fresh dirt to fill in grave depressions. The committee worked quietly and hard; the men wanted to do everything they could to help. The 611th was now part of the family in Margraten and it looked like we were destined to stay.



Studio Nico Zomer, Amsterdam Dutch girl placing flowers on an adopted grave.

#### Beautification

The first flowers planted at Margraten Cemetery were pansies, taken from a villager's garden. The soil was excellent; the pansies began to bloom and never stopped.

Early in the spring we needed a windbreak as well as a natural screen to hide the crosses from passing troops along the Aachen highway. A barrier of spruces and other trees would look very fitting. It wasn't long before we obtained trees from the hills near Gulpen, young, beautiful Norway spruces, five to ten feet high. Both the American and German sections of the cemetery were screened.

At Munster, a small German nursery grew a variety of fine conifers — blue cedar, golden cedar, juniper, hemlock. The Military Government gave us permission to take them to Margraten. Instantly, the cemetery took on a new beauty, a new elegance.

However, the mud was still giving us trouble; it clung to everything. One day we tried gravel and discovered the answer to our problem. There was a great deal of clean gravel on the Maas River that the Ninth Army had reserved. We received permission to get about ten truckloads; before we were through, we had used two hundred.

We spread the gravel on the avenues between the plots. The only difficulty was that the gravel kept running into the plots, detracting from their appearance. We soon solved that problem too. Aachen had a great deal of rock, the square block variety, that would make an excellent border for each plot. Within six weeks we had lined the entire cemetery.

### Civilian Workers

The work was piling up at Margraten; we needed hundreds



of workers. The odor from the bodies was getting worse and could be smelled all the way to the village. Memorial services were approaching and we had no one to do the work of beautification. Finally, I received permission from Ninth Army to employ civilians. Many came from Vaals, near the German frontier. We also got a few workers from Margraten; but labor in our village was scarce, as we had taken all the good land from the farmers and then men had to seek employment elsewhere. Our foreman was John Silvius, a tireless worker, who spoke excellent English. He had trained in the English Navy and was a very competent man; I was lucky to have him.

John was in his late fifties. One day he came to work glowing with happiness—his wife had given birth to their first child. He was worried, however, because the baby appeared weak. When it died, along with dozens of others, of intestinal flu, John was brokenhearted. We tried to console him, and gave him a beautiful bouquet of flowers. John was back at work the next day, grieved to be sure, but faithful as always to his beloved Margraten.

#### **Visitors**

Dutch people came to the cemetery every day. The spring of 1945 was particularly grand, the weather perfect. People came from all over Holland. We did not mind having the adults, but were angry when children came to the stripping line to see what they knew was forbidden.

One young Dutch girl visited the grave of her American lover several times a week. She and her mother brought flowers and would kneel and pray at the grave, their eyes red and their bodies bent with fatigue. They had nothing to eat, so we fed



them sandwiches. The two of them would stay at the grave all day long.

There were prescribed visiting hours for the cemetery; otherwise we could never have gotten our work done. People would stand at the main gate with armfuls of flowers, waiting for the cemetery to open.

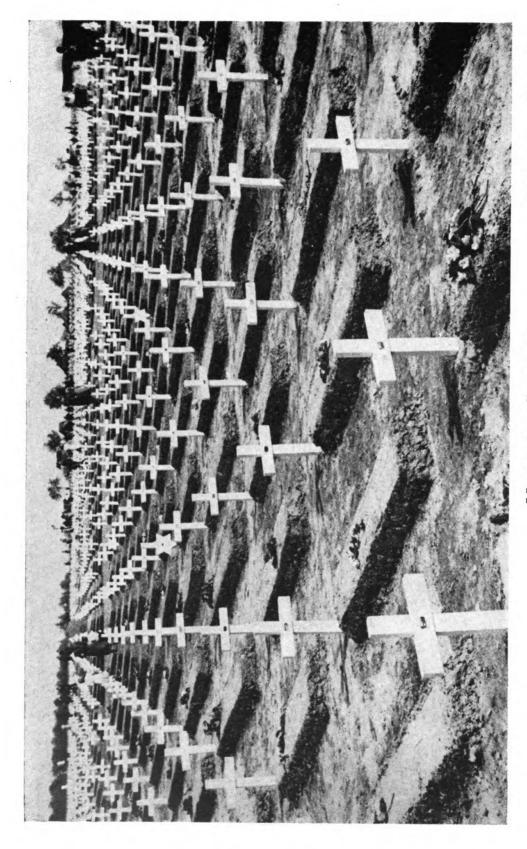
## Adopted Graves

The idea of adopting American graves started soon after the Battle of the Bulge and swept through Margraten, Limburg, Holland, and finally through all of Europe. Before Memorial Day, 1945, several hundred graves were already under adoption. I remember one WAC mother who came to see where her only son lay buried and collapsed among the crosses when she found his grave. The thought that some Dutch family would look after the grave was a great comfort to her. She had come to Margraten all the way from Reims, accompanied by a young medical officer. For two days she remained with us, weeping and sobbing until it was necessary for her to leave. Months later, I met her in Marseille; she was still the sad, tired mother that we knew back in Margraten.

#### Reunion

Our other platoons were returning to Margraten from their stations in Germany. The war was over in Europe and Captain Bailey wanted the entire company assembled for the Memorial Day services. It was good being together again. We could relax and just concentrate on keeping the cemetery in order and completing our plans for Memorial Day. Bodies continued to arrive; but with a full company assembled, we were more than able to take care of the work.





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However, our main problem was getting enough flowers to cover all of the 17,000 graves. Once more the good people of Margraten came to our rescue. The Committee worked tirelessly, making all the arrangements. Father Heusschen, a new parish assistant at the Church of Margraten, devoted much of his time to the plans.

The day before the services, our twenty trucks collected flowers from sixty villages and brought them in great piles to the cemetery. Nearly two hundred men, women and children worked all night long, placing wreaths and flowers on the graves. Morning came, and with it a beautiful sight. Here were acres of colorful fresh flowers; here were acres of clean white crosses, aligned straight in every direction. A new American flag waved gloriously over the silent fields of Margraten, the largest war cemetery in the world.

#### The Services

By 8 A. M. on Memorial Day the highway from Maastricht was filled with people coming to the cemetery. They came from across the Maas, from Sittard, from Heerlen, from Valkenburg, from Vaals and Gulpen. They came on foot, on bicycles, in carriages, on horseback, in automobiles. Soldiers were coming too, from every Corps, every Division, every Regiment in Ninth Army.

On the cemetery road near the flag, we had erected a platform large enough to accommodate thirty people. This was reserved for General Simpson and sixteen other generals, representing all the Corps and Divisions in his Army. There were also places for the Dutch officials and for Army chaplains.

At 11 o'clock our entire company was assembled in formation just to the left of the speakers' platform. To our right, the



3136th Q. M. Service Company formed in three ranks, with Captain Abar and his lieutenants out in front. My executive officer, Donovan, stood by a huge stack of wreaths, one for each Division general, near the stairway leading down from the platform. Dutch civilians, thirty thousand of them, formed a square around the border of the cemetery, two hundred deep in places. Along the left edge of the cemetery, four shining 105 mm. guns with their crews were ready to fire salutes. In front, on the gravel near the flag, was Ninth Army's special band. A bugler was waiting near the flagpole with a colored soldier who was trained to lower the flag. More than thirty war correspondents were busy writing notes and taking pictures. Newsreel cameras were set, the microphone was ready. Airplanes flew overhead and took pictures which they later rushed to London. The generals arrived one by one and seated themselves on the speakers' stand.

Then, a hush fell over the multitude. General Simpson, Commanding General of the Ninth Army, was arriving. People watched silently. He parked his car in a reserved spot, stepped out, and came forward with great dignity. He advanced toward the platform and mounted the steps. We all snapped to attention.

General Simpson returned a few salutes, shook a few hands, then turned quickly to the microphone. He began to speak. His was a clear voice, courageous, filled with deep emotion. His words were terse yet gentle. Now and then he looked up at all the crosses and flowers, and hesitated a moment. The humbleness of the good Dutch people profoundly and visibly stirred him.

When the General finished his speech, he proceeded quickly



down the stairs to the huge pile of wreaths. Donovan handed him the first one, the largest and most beautiful. The General took it, marched to Plot C and a marked grave. It was the grave of an unknown soldier of the Ninth Army. He made a left face, carefully laid the wreath on the grave, backed away, stood erect and gave a military salute, then returned to the platform.

This ceremony was repeated by each one of his sixteen Corps and Division generals, each laying a wreath upon the grave of a member of his unit. Then the chaplains spoke. The Hebrew chaplain spoke last, touched the heart and soul of everyone present. The Dutch people who understood English were perceptibly stirred, wept in bowed reverence. The guns boomed their salutes, one by one, perfectly timed, their fire resounding in the distant Limburg countryside. Next came taps, followed by a long silence and the benediction.

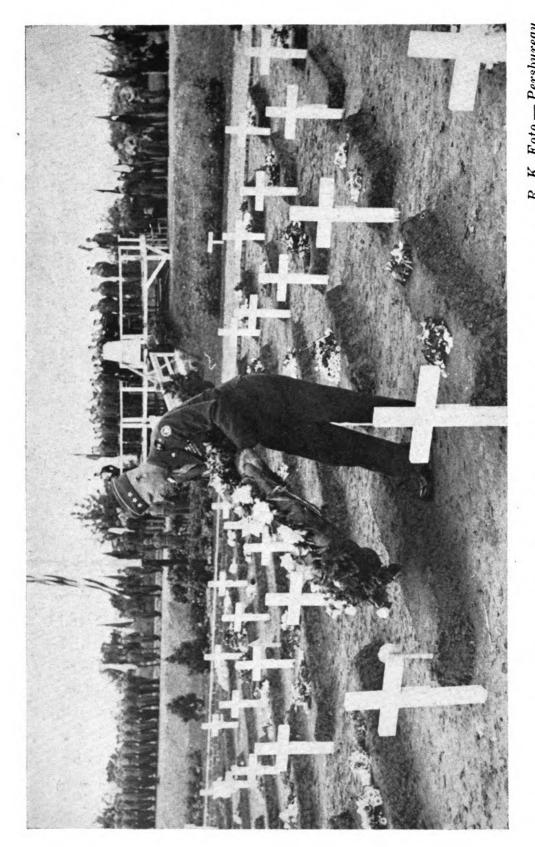
Then, the band reverently played our wonderful National Anthem, "The Star Spangled Banner." The flag was slowly lowered. We watched silently, cold shivers running down our spines, our hearts pounding. A great and noble honor had been paid to our heroic dead.

In the afternoon, we moved our little wooden altar from the chaplain's tent out to the cemetery for an additional service planned by the Dutch people. Thousands of them had stayed, and now gathered around Father Heynen praying and reciting the Holy Rosary. When mass started, I felt an even greater gratitude to the people of Holland for their magnificent tribute to our dead comrades.

# Farewell to Margraten

On June 1, we received orders to go back to Germany to





 $R.\ K.\ Foto-Persbureau$  Lt. Gen. Simpson placing wreath on grave of an unknown soldier.

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help in the search for American bodies and to start making arrangements for the return of those already buried in temporary graves. A week later came a set of "warning orders" — we were one of the companies named to move to the Pacific Theatre of Operations. We were a sad outfit; we hated the thought of leaving our beloved Margraten, our friends and our cemetery. The platoons were recalled from Germany. Once more came orders, this time to start training for graves registration — to train for graves registration after we had spent nearly fifteen months in actual operation! It seemed ridiculous. The men couldn't take it and I didn't press the point; we covered only subjects that we would need for work in the Pacific.

Soon we were released from operational control of Margraten, and turned over the entire cemetery, records and all, to another company. When I paid my last visit to the cemetery, I noticed poppies springing up here and there between the crosses. No one had planted them — they just grew. I plucked one of them and scattered the petals in the wind. I said goodbye to Margraten.

The people of the village talked for days about our departure. They hated to see us leave. Our plans for a great memorial, with beautiful landscaping and fifty thousand tulips, no longer seemed possible. We were going to a new theatre of war; Japan was still fighting.

The morning we left, the entire village turned out to bid us goodbye. Our vehicles were lined up in formation, headed for Maastricht. The people jammed the streets; many were crying. The 611th, after more than nine months of friendship, was leaving Margraten. A little band played for us. Father Heynen said a parting prayer and the Burgomaster made a





speech. We stood in formation, facing them. I was nervous, but I had to speak.

"Beloved friends of Margraten, we leave you this morning—much to our sorrow. It is not of our choosing. War still rages in the Pacific; there are other dead that need our service. Our work here is finished, not the way we would like to have it, but done in the best way we knew how. We have tried, with your fine help, to make a good resting place for our comrades.

"We leave you in sadness. You have been good to us and we respect you above any people we have met in this war. We are proud of your friendship, your love. We are leaving, but we cannot forget you. We will remember Margraten, Father Heynen, Mr. and Mrs. Ronckers, Joe, all of you. I am sure the American people will never forget your kindness. The friendship between Holland and the United States is closer because of Margraten.

"This is how we feel this morning; we shall always feel this way. May God bless you and your good work. May He always look after you, in times of joy and sorrow. May He look after the dead which we leave in your care this bright but sorrowful June morning. Goodbye — and God be with you always."

After our departure from Margraten, the 603rd Graves Registration Company took over in earnest. They began disinterment operations in Germany and interred the dead at Margraten. When I visited the cemetery from Camp Brooklyn in the Assembly Area Command near Reims, the place was very busy. All the mounds covering the graves had been leveled off, making the appearance a little strange. This was not as friendly a company; perhaps they resented the close feeling



between the 611th and the people of Margraten. Many other units took over the cemetery after the 603rd departed — 3059th G. R. Company, the 6869th Q. M. Battalion, and the 336th Q. M. Battalion.

#### Calas and Marseille

From Camp Brooklyn we moved to the Calas Staging Area near Marseille in south France, where we prepared for the move to the Pacific. Our vehicles were shipped and most of our operational equipment. Everything that wasn't marked TAT (to accompany troops) was securely boxed, coded, and sent off.

Calas was a big place, teeming with troops. Equipment was piled up for miles; it was orderly, unlike the camouflaged setting in southern England before the invasion.

Passes to Marseille and some of the surrounding cities were given frequently. Still this did not satisfy the average soldier, who was now completely disillusioned after having fought one war, escaping with his life, and was now being sent to another, perhaps yet more horrible. One could not blame him too much for his misconduct, his drunkenness, his remarks to the French women. He had been a killer just the day before, trained to hate and be tough; it was difficult to change overnight.

## V-J Day in France

On August 6, 1945, President Truman announced to the world the first use of the atomic bomb against the Japanese Naval Base of Hiroshima. This news struck hard in Calas. Perhaps the war would not last much longer; perhaps the Russians would declare war against Japan and end the whole business in a hurry.

The Russians did declare war, and the Japanese surrender



offers soon came. There was much excitement in our camp. The news reached us late at night and spread like wildfire. Troops charged out of their tents and went wild; many got guns and ammunition and began shooting. Bullets flew in all directions, anti-aircraft guns rattled, grenades exploded and bonfires lit the countryside. It was a mad, dangerous night. Control was completely absent, except for a few companies. Our unit stayed in its area and hoped the bullets would miss. They did — none of the men were hurt. Next day, however, there were many soldiers in the hospital, some were dead. The colonel in charge of the Staging Area was terribly angry and threatened disciplinary action against lax officers. He might have expected such a celebration; he had ample warning. As far as I remember, nothing was done to any unit that took part in the demonstration.

With V-J Day behind us, plans were put into effect to take us back to the states. Our ship was named, but we had to wait. The men took vacations to the Riviera, Paris, Marseille. Then one day I heard that the 611th was going back to Germany!

# Farewell, 611th

When I received orders confirming our status as an occupation unit, I released the news to the men with a heavy heart. The 611th was breaking up. All the officers were leaving—some returning to the States, others going into units scheduled to depart for home in the near future. The rest of the company, with its new officers, would be sent back to Germany for further graves registration duty.

This was a tough break for the 611th. Its excellent record once more proved to be a boomerang. When the company





R. K. Foto—Persbureau Gen. McNarney and Prince Bernhard at Memorial Day Services, 1946.

assembled for the last time, it was one of the saddest days of my life. What a grand unit the 611th was! It had no court martials, no AWOL's, no cases of venereal disease, never a blemish on its record. The men, faithful and courageous, went back to Germany to do their duty once more. I went home; my days with the 611th were ended.

## Margraten Today

Today, Margraten Cemetery is the largest of World War II. Our pansies still bloom in the flower beds. The Norway spruce trees have grown several feet taller along the borders where we planted them. Tulips now blossom here and there; many thousands more will be planted, as well as rhododendrons and other evergreens to border the cemetery. Our wooden crosses are still there, standing clean and white. Someday they may be replaced by marble crosses or slabs. The crosses and Stars of David simply bear the deceased's name and serial number; in death there is no distinction in rank, color, or creed.

The cemetery has been greatly enriched by native flowers, grass, and shrubbery. Dutch landscape artists and foresters are working with American authorities to establish a more enlarged beautification plan. A headquarters building has been erected, where visitors may obtain the exact location of any grave. In a cross-index reference file this information can be found in a few seconds. Other information, the courteous attendants tell you, can be had by writing to the U. S. Graves Registration Command in Paris, to the Dutch families who have adopted the graves, and to Graves Registration Service in Washington, D. C.

On May 30, 1946, Memorial Day services were again held



at Margraten. Joseph T. McNarney, European Theatre Forces Commanding General, was present, with many high ranking officials, including Prince Bernhard of Holland. The services were held at three in the afternoon. The invocation was given by Colonel John I. Rhea, Acting Theatre Chaplain; scripture by Chaplain Max Braude of Headquarters Constabulary. General McNarney's address followed. Again there was the laying of wreaths by representatives of the United States and the Netherlands. Then came the volley, taps, silence, and the benediction by Chaplain Walter B. Sullivan. Our National Anthem rang out once more, followed by the Netherlands National Anthem. It was another beautiful memorial service.

The Civilian Committee of Margraten, its work and dreams nearly complete, circulated leaflets to more than fifty thousand people attending the service. Printed in English, the leaflets read: "In deep gratitude and reverence the Dutch people adopt the graves of their heroic American liberators — may they rest in peace."

In the summer of 1946, Mrs. Edward H. Jordan, President and Founder of the Gold Star Wives of World War II, paid a visit to Margraten. We had buried her husband. In a feature article appearing in a newspaper syndicate she wrote:

"Having recently returned from a visit to American cemeteries in Europe, I can say that there is no ground for misgiving. Through the tireless work of the American Graves Registration Command, our cemeteries are models of orderliness and thoughtful care.

"The first one I visited after flying to Europe at the invitation of the Royal Dutch KLM Airlines, was Margraten, Holland, where my husband, Edward H. Jordan, a private with the



29th Infantry Division, lies buried. He was killed in combat by a mortar shell November 25, 1944, near Alsdorf, Germany. The cemetery was in excellent condition — more than twenty thousand white crosses neatly placed on graves covered with perfectly groomed grass. Each grave was decorated with an American flag, and strewn with fresh flowers brought by the Dutch people.

"Similar conditions prevail at all of the 209 cemeteries throughout the world. All markings on the crosses or Stars of David are identical — the names and serial numbers. The grave of an unknown soldier receives the same attention as that of a private, a colonel, or a general.

"After the remains of American soldiers have been returned to this country, to private or national cemeteries, the overseas cemeteries will be arranged into eight permanent resting grounds. At that time, landscape architects will be sent overseas to make these cemeteries into memorial parks. In France, the World War I cemeteries gave me an idea as to how the present cemeteries would be improved in the years to come. Beautiful flower beds surround the American flag in the center of each cemetery, and orderly paths lead through the rows of tall marble crosses to impressive memorial chapels.

"The search for the bodies of men still listed as missing in action continues. This is done by the American Army, which is sparing no effort to identify lost U. S. soldiers, sailors, and marines. Village by village the American Graves Registration Command is covering the battle areas of the world to see if it can find any clue that may lead to an isolated grave, or the ruins of tanks or planes where the body of an American soldier may lie. If other methods fail, expert anthropologists examine



Holy mass at the chapel, Margraten Cemetery.

R. K. Foto - Persbureau

the bone structure for physical characteristics which might lead to positive identification. In contrast to this painstaking care, only ten per cent of the German dead are identified, I am told.

"The questionnaire asking the wishes of the next of kin will be circulated sometime soon by the War Department. In general, I find, most people will act on their conception of what the lost relative himself would have desired. Fortunately, our War Department is making no general ruling, but is leaving the whole matter to the individual. That is intelligent, American, and right."



## VIII

#### PEACE BE TO THEM .

# The O. Q. M. G.

When Congress passed legislation in 1946 providing for the final burial of our World War II dead, the great task of carrying out this gigantic program was given to the Secretary of War, who in turn delegated his authority to the Office of the Quartermaster General. Since 1866, when the Quartermaster Corps was first given the task of burying our military dead, this duty has been performed with greatest respect. America has always felt a solemn obligation to take care of those who have paid the supreme sacrifice in the service of their country. The burial of war dead, whether overseas or in the United States, has been done with dignity and honor, an American policy since the days of George Washington.

Now that the war is over, we must face the facts impartially. Overseas are more than a quarter of a million dead. What are we going to do with them? Where should the final burial be — overseas or at home? How much will it cost? Will the next of kin get the right body? What is the Government doing to locate the still missing? Will the overseas cemeteries be taken care of? The War Department is attempting to answer these and other vital questions. They must be answered if the people who have lost loved ones are to make a just decision.

Our Government's responsibility for the care of our war





International News Photo
The grave of Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., at Hamm Cemetery, Luxembourg. The wreath was placed here personally by Winston Churchill.

dead from all branches of the service and its obligation to the families who have lost them is a great one indeed. The Office of the Quartermaster General has been designated as the agency, and the sole agency, to handle the repatriation program and to handle all official matters concerning our overseas cemeteries, the location of graves, and communications with the next of kin. No other agency has been given this right; no group, no organization can claim to be the official spokesman for this all-important job. The War Department says: "Human depravity reaches no greater depths than in the persons who seek their own gain by fraud and chicanery at the expense of the next of kin and relatives of those who have lost loved ones in World War II."

There have been altogether too many examples of fraud, heartache, and fake schemes to extort money under false pretenses. There are people and organizations who have promised information concerning the dead, or who have promised to furnish photographs, or even the remains of the dead, for a fee. Families should obtain only the official information, and this from the best possible source. The Office of the Quartermaster General in Washington, D. C., is the best place for all questions concerning graves registration.

I have tried to obtain the latest information from Washington. This information was readily released by the Office of the Quartermaster General and is quoted from radio and press publications. One of the best releases was an article prepared by General George A. Horkan, Director of the Memorial Division. It is quoted in part:

"Our prosecution of World War II was truly global in scope. Thus, the problems confronting us in providing for the



final burial of those who died overseas during the war in the service of their country are of great magnitude. We are proceeding in carrying out this program with all the speed commensurate with accurate, efficient operation. Congress has set a time limit of five years in which this work is to be accomplished. I think it will be completed in much less time, but it is impossible to make any definite forecast at the moment.

"Each step in the program has been planned to provide dignity and respect in handling the remains of those who gave their lives for their country. No distinction or differences of any kind will be shown because of rank, color, or creed. No priorities will be granted and activities will follow an orderly process beginning with a complete verification of the burial records, now underway at temporary cemeteries overseas, as well as in higher field headquarters and the Office of the Quartermaster General.

"We plan to accomplish this program in this way. The War Department, in the absence of special circumstances, will recognize the wishes of relatives for final burial in the following order:

"If the deceased were married, the surviving spouse has the first and final preference. However, he or she must not have been divorced or separated at the time of his death, or remarried.

"If the husband or wife has remarried, or the parties were divorced or separated prior to the death, then the preference passes to the sons who are over 21 years of age.

"If there is no son over 21 years of age, the preference passes to the daughters who are over 21 years of age.

"If there are children under age, or there are no children



at all, then the right to dispose of the remains passes to surviving relatives in the order of their relationship to the deceased.

"The Judge Advocate General has rendered an opinion that the right to dispose of remains may be waived or relinquished, but, in the event of such waiver or relinquishment, the right to direct disposition of remains must pass to the person next on the list of those eligible and may not be assigned to anyone by a person relinquishing his or her rights.

"The letter to be sent to the relatives concerned will give them an opportunity to exercise one of four options for final disposition of remains. With this letter a brochure will be enclosed which will contain answers to many of the more frequently asked questions. There will also be enclosed a booklet showing photographs of National Cemeteries in the United States and permanent U. S. military cemeteries."

# The Four Options

The four options which the War Department has afforded for the next of kin for the disposition of remains, overseas or in the United States are:

"First: The remains may be interred or reinterred in a permanent American military cemetery overseas. The establishment of permanent overseas cemeteries is contemplated, should the number of requests justify their establishment.

"Second: The remains may be returned to the United States for final interment in a National Cemetery. Burial of remains in a National Cemetery is restricted to members of the armed forces only. When this option is desired, the remains will be transported to the Continental United States and interred in the National Cemetery selected by the next of kin.



"Third: The remains may be returned to the United States or any possession or territory thereof, for interment in a private cemetery. Shipment will be made to the city or town designated by the next of kin.

"Fourth: The remains may be reinterred in the country in which they now are interred or be returned to a foreign country, the homeland of the deceased or the homeland of the next of kin, for interment by the next of kin in a private cemetery. Shipment to a foreign country is dependent upon the ability of the United States Government to obtain entry therein. If entry can be made therein, shipment will be made to the city or town designated by the next of kin.

"The exact date when the first remains will arrive at the ports of New York and San Francisco will be announced as soon as it can be determined. Remains will be sent to the city or town designated by next of kin through 15 Distribution Centers designated as Office of the American Graves Registration Service. These offices will be: New York; San Francisco; Atlanta; Charlotte; Philadelphia; Schenectady; Columbus; Chicago; Memphis; Kansas City; Fort Worth; San Antonio; Ogden; Mira Loma; and Seattle.

"Persons who elect to have remains returned to the United States will receive two telegrams: the first when the remains arrive in the United States, which will be in ample time for making funeral arrangements. This telegram will ask the next of kin to give the name, and address of the funeral director and to verify instructions to the Graves Registration Service for delivery of the casket. The second telegram will advise of the dispatch of the casket, means of transportation, and exact date of its expected arrival at the place designated.



U. S. Military Cemetery, Mirandola, Italy.

"Activities overseas are carried on by nine Graves Registration Commands, in two areas and seven zones, as follows: European Area; Pacific Area; Africa-Middle East Zone; Mediterranean Theatre Zone; American Zone; Caribbean Defense Command Zone; Alaska Department Zone; China Theatre Zone; and India-Burma Theatre Zone.

"At present (1947) the total for the world is 209 cemeteries in which American dead of World War II are interred. The remains include 240,483 identified and 12,572 unidentified. The total number of isolated graves of which the locations are known is 19,215, which includes 10,810 identified and 8,405 unidentified. In addition there are an estimated 19,625 unlocated isolated graves throughout the world. Thus, the grand total maxim number of remains is 291,895."

## Delay in Repatriation

One of the big factors contributing to the delay in the repatriation program has been the shortage of caskets. After much research, a seamless steel casket was decided on, which would be hermetically sealed, conservative in design, and light in weight. There has also been insufficient material to produce outer cases to go along with the caskets. The shortage of steel in casket manufacture has been the greatest cause of delay in the entire program.

According to War Department figures, the cost to the Government of returning the remains of one member of the armed forces, including cost of casket and case, is estimated to be \$657.00.

"As a statement of future policy," General Horkan writes, "it is not the intention of the War Department to disclose publicly the individual decisions of the next of kin regarding



final disposition of remains. The War Department believes, even though the dead gave their lives for their country, that this is a right belonging to the next of kin, and information about final burial arrangements should come from the family without War Department invasion of their privacy or public display of their sorrow."

#### Personal Effects

No treatment of the subject of graves registration would be complete without some reference to the disposition of personal effects of the deceased. I have already tried to point out that in the field, personal effects of the dead were safeguarded by every possible means. I have yet to know of one instance where the effects were improperly removed from the bodies. In our unit, small change was considered "souvenir money" and enclosed with other personal items; or, if the quantity was over two dollars, it was turned over to the nearest Army Finance Office and subsequently sent to the next of kin. Other effects, like watches, rings, wallets, photographs, and the like, were carefully placed into a personal effects bag and sent to the Port Quartermaster, who in turn shipped them to the Effects Quartermaster, Kansas City Quartermaster Depot, Kansas City, Missouri. Here the effects were sorted, cleaned, and then shipped to the next of kin.

Many people cannot understand why the package they received contained only a few of the real personal items of the deceased. What happened to his ring, his watch, they frequently ask. There are many answers. Often the remains were in bad shape and the effects were lost. It cannot be denied that many of the effects fell into enemy hands. In many cases,



soldiers had given away personal items, traded them, or promised them to a buddy in event of their death. And a few unscrupulous soldiers in combat areas may have "borrowed" watches from their dead comrades to prevent their falling into enemy hands, or to keep for themselves. This was particularly true with enemy dead. When we received them at the collecting points or at the cemetery, they were fairly well stripped of personal effects. Once they arrived at the cemetery, however, the effects were carefully removed, safeguarded, and sent away. Graves registration troops were above reproach—always, everywhere. We were on the spot and we knew it; only our most careful and most reliable men worked with personal effects. I can truthfully state that there can be no suspicion or room for misgiving about their work.

### Questions and Answers

I hope that this book has given some idea of the Graves Registration Service and its function in the war. I hope that it has brought the people a little closer to the hardships which all troops had to endure and closer to the crosses upon crosses in the wind.

I know that many questions are unanswered; many will remain so for a long time. However, here are a few questions that are frequently asked, with as definite an answer as I can give.

Where can I get more information about my husband or son who is buried in a temporary cemetery? The agency designated by our government for the dissemination of information on grave locations is the Office of the Quartermaster General, Memorial Division, Washington, D. C.



Are we sure to get the right body if we request the remains to be returned to this country? The Quartermaster General has given every assurance that identification will be beyond question. The War Department will not, under any circumstances, undertake even to notify the next of kin concerning disposition of remains if positive identification has not been established.

What will be left of the bodies when they arrive? No one can answer this question. It depends on the condition of the body at the time of interment, the length of time between interments, and many other factors. Certainly, the remains will not be fit for exploration or exhibition. The opening of hermetically sealed caskets is not recommended.

Will the present temporary war cemeteries be made into permanent sites? Not very likely. Only a few will probably be used for permanent cemeteries. The War Department has not definitely decided where the permanent memorials will be located.

I am a veteran. How can I help my friends when the remains of their son come back to this country? The Quartermaster General answers this question by saying, "During those solemn days many families will need the kindly help and recommendations for funeral arrangements which you, as a veteran, can give. This will be a trying period for most next of kin and their families. The sorrow of their loss naturally makes these people want to seek some strong arm on which to lean."

Are there sufficient funds to adequately care for our cemeteries overseas? Yes. The War Department states that adequate funds are available for the proper care of cemeteries overseas;



they have all been beautified and landscaped, and are now being given good care.

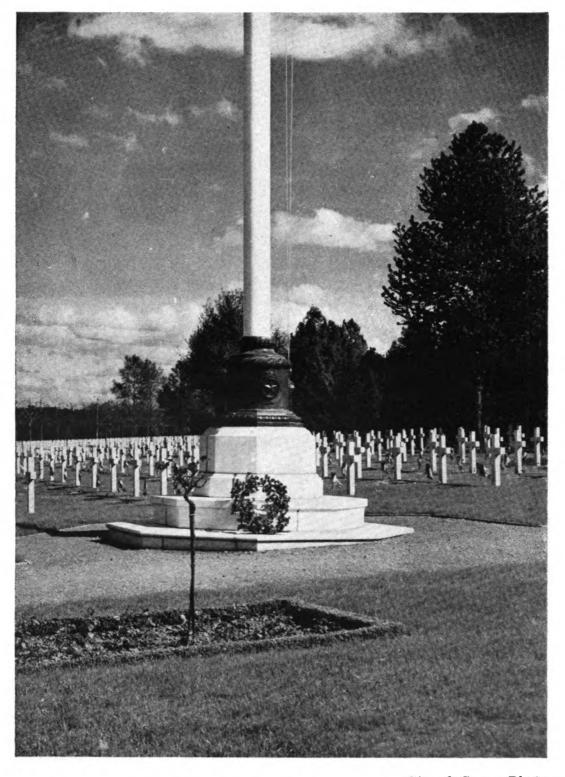
What option does the War Department favor in repatriation? While every assistance will be given relatives, the War Department does not favor any particular option. It suggests that next of kin who desire advice in filling out the reply form consult public officials, the clergy, or any veterans' organization. In a broadcast regarding final disposition of remains, General Larkin said, "These are questions of such a personal nature that those of you concerned must not be subjected to undue pressure to make decisions which later you may wish to change. You must be permitted time for counsel. For this reason the War Department encourages full discussion of its plans. It will make available to the next of kin all information.

#### War Cemeteries

In World War I, 78,734 Americans died and were buried in European soil. Families were given the choice of leaving their dead in permanent cemeteries in France or bringing them back to the United States at government expense. A little over half preferred to have them brought back, while the remainder chose to have them interred in memorials like Belleau Wood, Meuse-Argonne, St. Mihiel, and others.

The permanent cemeteries overseas were made beautiful; they are models of artistic design and harmony. One of the largest is Meuse-Argonne, near Verdun. Here is a magnificent memorial designed in eight plots, with a picturesque white chapel in the center. The crosses are marble, clear white and over three feet tall. The trees are artistically planted around the cemetery and around the plots, blending in softly with the





Belleau Wood Cemetery near Chateau Thiery, France, a
World War I Memorial

French landscape. Overlooking the memorial is a large building where visitors register and secure lodging during their stay. Down the hill is a lovely pool which occupies the center of a natural depression. An impressive avenue of trees separates an equal number of plots and graves on a rising hillside. It is indeed a beautiful memorial.

Unlike World War I cemeteries, the resting grounds of our World War II dead are not permanent and will not be made into memorials until the wishes of the next of kin have been made known and the repatriation program is completed. Then permanent cemeteries may be set up in different parts of the world. Our 209 temporary cemeteries are widely scattered; but already their number is diminishing as unsuitable ones are being eliminated by having their bodies disinterred and put into the larger, better cemeteries. As the repatriation program progresses, fewer and fewer temporary cemeteries will be in existence. The task of repatriation is large indeed, for we have 291,895 members of the armed forces that must be given a final burial.

#### National Cemeteries

Service men and women dying in the service of the United States, and other men and women who have served in the armed services during peace or war and whose discharge is honorable are eligible for burial in a national cemetery. This privilege excludes persons "discharged from draft" who for some reason were rejected for military service. Reserve officers who have had no active duty other than training and instruction, and who die while on inactive duty, likewise are not eligible for interment in a national cemetery. Members of the Merchant Marine, as civilians, are not eligible either.



# Evidence of Right

According to "Veteran's Rights and Benefits," a recent publication put out by the Veterans Administration, certain evidence of military service is mandatory before interment can be made in a national cemetery. In every case, the veteran's "honorable discharge" is necessary from the last period of service. A discharge certificate is sufficient evidence to allow the cemetery superintendent to permit interment. Where doubt exists, the superintendent will communicate with the Office of the Quartermaster General for verification and authority of interment. Pension certificates will not be accepted as authority for burial.

#### **Burial Benefits**

The Quartermaster General of the Army and the Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery of the Navy have the authority over disposition of remains in post cemeteries at the place of death, shipment home, or interment in a national cemetery. Burial benefits include: burial expenses proper — not to exceed \$150 for Army and \$200 for Navy personnel; authorized transportation of body; interment flag; clothing for the body; expense to recover the body; interment expenses — if the body is shipped to the family, burial expenses not to exceed \$50; cremation on written request; furnishing of headstones; military honors, if available.

Veterans may be interred in a Veterans Administration cemetery or a national cemetery. If a government contract undertaker furnishes burial services, all expenses are paid by the Veterans Administration; otherwise, reimbursement for



burial expenses, not to exceed \$100 plus transportation, will be allowed.

Headstones are regulation size, upright, white marble crosses, Stars of David, or slabs, placed at all graves in national cemeteries, except in special cases where a private monument may be erected. The veteran's name, rank, organization, dates of birth and death, state, and decorations are inscribed. In the case of a veteran's wife, if in a separate grave, her name, the fact that she is the deceased's wife, dates of her birth and death are given. If she is in the same grave as her husband, the words "His Wife," her name, and dates of birth and death are inscribed.

In the newly established cemeteries, no private monuments are permitted and each grave is marked with an identical white marble upright headstone.

Interment of members of families is limited. Wives of officers and enlisted men may be buried with their husbands in national cemeteries. If the wife is interred first, the husband will be buried in a grave adjacent to hers. Minor children and unmarried daughters may also be buried in national cemeteries where lots are assigned to an individual, providing there is room and certain regulations are met.

### Final Burial

As I write these closing pages to Crosses in the Wind, I am glad that my work in graves registration is at an end. I have tried to depict in words and in pictures the service which has been accorded our war dead, and to state the present and future plans of our Government to care for them. If I have brought a small measure of comfort to one widow, one child, one family, I consider my labors not in vain.



The issue of final burial is not closed. Many service men have been asked their opinion on the subject. Some did not want to think about dying; others thought about it seriously. Some wanted to be buried with their buddies where they fell; others wanted to be buried back home. One chaplain said, "The world is a lot smaller than it was in 1939 and we Americans may as well realize it. The bodies of our sons and husbands lying overseas are the surest link we can have with the rest of the world." One American lieutenant in Germany said: "Well, if we're going to move them anyway let's move them back to America."

But we must ask the widows, the orphans, the parents, the close relatives. Is it not their opinion, their decision, their sorrow that is all-important? Is it not for them to say whether the dead should be brought home for burial or laid to final rest in foreign soil? I think so.



# **APPENDIX**



#### APPENDIX I

The Price of Victory—a comparison of wars of the United States.\*

War	Months Duration	Total Battle Deaths	Average Deaths Per Month
American Revolution	80	4,044	50
War of 1812	30	1,877	62
Mexican War	20	1,721	86
Civil War (Union losses)	48	110,070	2,293
Civil War (Confederate losses)	48	74,524	1,552
Spanish-American	4	345	86
World War I	19	50,510	2,658
World War II	44	201,367	4,576

<sup>\*</sup>Figures from Biennial Report of the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, 1943 to 1945, to the Secretary of War.



#### APPENDIX II

Battle casualties of the United States in the European Theatre of Operations:

	World War I	World War II
Killed in action (KIA)	34,785	98,812
Died of Wounds (DOW)	14,713	15,140
Wounded (W)	205,690	373,018
Prisoners (P)	4,480	24,783
Missing (M)	1,609	42,279



#### APPENDIX III

As of June 30, 1946, the American Graves Registration Service maintained a total of 209 cemeteries throughout the world. The temporary cemeteries in which American service and civilian dead of World War II are buried are located by theaters and zones as follows:\*

\*This information is quoted from a press release by the Public Relations Division of the War Department.

#### **EUROPEAN THEATER AREA**

- BELGIUM: U. S. Military Cemetery at Fosse, located 42 miles southwest of Liège.
  - U. S. Military Cemetery at Foy, located four miles north of Bastogne.
  - U. S. Military Cemetery at Henri-Chapelle, located 18 miles northeast of Liège.
  - U. S. Military Cemetery at Neuville-en-Condroz, located nine miles southwest of Liège.
- ENGLAND: U. S. Military Cemetery at Brookwood, located 30 miles southwest of London.
  - U. S. Military Cemetery at Cambridge, located 50 miles north of London.
- FRANCE: U. S. Military Cemetery at Andilly, 15 miles northwest of Nancy.



- U. S. Military Cemetery at Blosville, 25 miles southeast of Cherbourg.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Champigneul, 20 miles southeast of Reims.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Draguignan, 27 miles west of Cannes.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Epinal, two and one-half miles south of Epinal.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Gorron, 45 miles northeast of Rennes.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Grand Failly, ten miles north of Verdun.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Hochfelden, 15 miles northwest of Strasbourg.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at La Cambe, 17 miles north of St. Lô.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Le Chene-Guerin, 14 miles south of St. Lô.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Limey, 18 miles northwest of Nancy.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Luynes, 24 miles north of Marseilles.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Marigny, nine miles west of St. Lô.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Solers, 22 miles southeast of Paris.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at St. Andre, 48 miles west of Paris.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at St. Avold, 23 miles east of Metz.



- U. S. Military Cemetery at St. Corneille, nine miles northeast of Le Mans.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at St. James, 33 miles northeast of Rennes.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at St. Juan, 17 miles northeast of Besancon.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at St. Laurent, 20 miles northeast of St. Lô.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Ste. Mère Eglise No. 1, 20 miles southeast of Cherbourg and U. S. Military Cemetery No. 2, also at Ste. Mère Eglise.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Varois, three miles northeast of Dijon.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Villeneuve-sur-Auvers, 27 miles south of Paris.
- HOLLAND: U. S. Military Cemetery at Margraten, ten miles west of Aachen.
  - U. S. Military Cemetery at Molenhoek, four miles south of Nijmegen.
  - U. S. Military Cemetery at Zon, six miles east of Eindhoven.

HUNGARY: U. S. Military Cemetery at Budapest.

IRELAND: Lisnabreeny Cemetery at Belfast.

LUXEMBOURG: U. S. Military Cemetery at Hamm, two and one-half miles east of Luxembourg.

NORWAY: American Military Cemetery at Oslo.

PORTUGAL: British Cemetery at Lisbon.



RUMANIA: U. S. Military Cemetery located near Sinaia, 70 miles northwest of Bucharest.

SPAIN: British Cemetery at Madrid.

SWEDEN: American Section of the Civil Cemetery at Malmo.

SWITZERLAND: U. S. Military Cemetery at Munsingen, 8 miles southeast of Bern

#### MEDITERRANEAN THEATER ZONE

BULGARIA: U. S. Military Cemetery at Sofia.

CORSICA: U. S. Military Cemetery at Bastia, four and a half miles south of the town of Bastia.

GIBRALTAR: North Front Cemetery at Gibraltar.

GREECE: U. S. Military Cemetery at Athens.

ITALY: U. S. Military Cemetery at Marzanello Nuovo, 19 miles southwest of Cassino.

U. S. Military Cemetery at Naples.

U. S. Military Cemetery at R. Fratelli, 18 miles southeast of Cassino.

U. S. Military Cemetery at Avellino, 17 miles north of Salerno.

U. S. Military Cemetery at Carano, 30 miles northwest of Naples

U. S. Military Cemetery at Nettuno, 32 miles south of Rome.

- U. S. Military Cemetery at Bari.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Castelfiorentino, 19 miles southwest of Florence.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Follonica, 50 miles southeast of Leghorn.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Mirandola, 18 miles northeast of Modena.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Mt. Soprano, Paestum, 22 miles southeast of Salerno.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Pietramala, 23 miles south of Bologna.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Tarquinia, 45 miles northwest of Rome.
- U. S. Military Cemetery at Vada, 16 miles southeast of Leghorn.
- SARDINIA: American Cemetery at Cagliari, located within St. Michael's Cemetery about three miles north of Cagliari.
- SICILY: U. S. Military Cemetery at Caronia, between Palermo and Messina.
  - U. S. Military Cemetery at Gela, 25 miles southeast of Licata.
  - U. S. Military Cemetery at Licata, one mile west of Licata.
  - U. S. Military Cemetery at Palermo, three miles northwest of Palermo.
- YUGOSLAVIA: U. S. Military Cemetery at Belgrade Island Cemetery Vis. off western coast of Yugoslavia.



#### AFRICA-MIDDLE EAST ZONE

ALGERIA: American Cemetery on Oran, located on city outskirts.

American Cemetery at Constantine, located in northwest suburbs of city.

American Cemetery at Souk Ahras, 70 miles due east of Constantine.

American Cemetery at Tebessa.

Military Cemetery at El Alia, nine miles southeast of Algiers.

EGYPT: American Cemetery at Heliopolis.

FRENCH MOROCCO: American Cemetery, Kasba Mehdia, at Port Lyautey.

European Cemetery at Casablanca.

European Cemetery at Fedala.

FRENCH WEST AFRICA: Bel-Air Cemetery at Dakar, Senegal.

IRAN: U. S. Military Cemetery at Amirabab Post, Teheran.

LIBERIA: Firestone Plantations Cemetery at Harbel.

NIGERIA: U. S. Military Cemetery at Lagos.

TRIPOLITANIA: U. S. Military Cemetery at Tripoli.

TUNISIA: American Cemetery at Beja.

American Cemetery at Gafsa.

American Cemetery at Hadjeb el Aouin.

American Cemetery at Ksar-Mezouar.

American Cemetery at Tunis. 11 Corps Cemetery at Mateur. ALASKA: Adak Island Cemetery on Adak Island on Aleutians.

American Cemetery at Naknek.

Army, Navy Cemetery at Fort Greely on Kodiak Island.

Base Cemetery at Ladd Field, Fairbanks.

Bayview Cemetery at Ketchikan.

Evergreen Cemetery at Juneau.

Fairbanks Cemetery at Fairbanks.

Fort Mears Cemetery on Shemya Island, Aleutians.

Holtz Bay Cemetery on Attu Island, Aleutians.

Kiska Military Cemetery on Kiska Island, Aleutians.

Little Falls Cemetery on Attu Island, Aleutians.

Post Cemeteries No. 1 and No. 2 at Nome.

Post Cemetery on Amchitka Island, Aleutians.

Post Cemetery at Fort Glenn on Unmak Island, Aleutians.

Post Cemetery at Fort Randall, Cold Bay.

Post Cemetery at Fort Raymond at Seward.

Post Cemetery at Fort Richardson, Anchorage.

Sitka National Cemetery at Sitka.

# AMERICAN ZONE

ASCENSION ISLAND: American Cemetery on Ascension Island.

BERMUDA: Fort Bell Cemetery at St. Davids.

BRAZIL: Alecrim Cemetery at Natal.

Army plot at Sao Joao Batista Cemetery at Fortaleza.

Army plot at Val de Cans Cemetery at Para.



Barro Cemetery at Recife.
British Cemetery at Bahia.
British Cemetery at Rio de Janeiro.
Campo Santo Cemetery at Bahia.
U. S. Army Cemetery at Sao Luiz.

GREENLAND: Station Cemetery at Army Air Base in Narsarssuak, located in the west coast of Greenland.

GUATAMALA: U. S. Army Air Base Cemetery at Guatamala City.

ICELAND: Fossvogur Cemetery, four miles from Reykjavik.

LABRADOR: Lest We Forget Cemetery at Goose Bay.

NEWFOUNDLAND: Harmon Field cemetery at Stephenville, on the bay of St. George, located on the west coast of Newfoundland. Fort McAndrews Military Cemetery at Argentia. Post Cemetery at Fort Pepperell.

#### CARIBBEAN DEFENSE COMMAND

BRITISH GUIANA: U. S. Military Cemetery at Atkinson Field, located at Georgetown.

BRITISH WEST INDIES: Base Cemetery of Antigua Base Command at Coolidge Field.

Antigua Graves Registration Cemetery of Fort Read, in Trinidad.

U. S. Army Cemetery at Santa Lucia.

U. S. Military Cemetery at Fort Simmonds, Jamaica.

CANAL ZONE: Corozal Cemetery.

Mt. Hope Cemetery.

COLOMBIA: El Cemeterio de San Pedro, at Medellin.

CUBA: Military Cemetery at Batista Airport, San Antonio de los Banos.

U. S. Naval Cemetery at Guatanamo Bay.

DUTCH GUIANA: Post Cemetery of Camp Paramaribo, located at Paramaribo.

ECUADOR: Andon Cemetery at Ancon.

NETHERLANDS WEST INDIES: U. S. Army Cemetery at San Nicholas, Aruba Post Cemetery at Curação.

PUERTO RICO: Post Cemetery of Borinquen Field, at Aguadilla.

Post Cemetery of Camp O'Reilly at Gurabo.

Post Cemetery of Fort Buchanan, at Fort Buchanan

Post Cemetery of Fort Brooke, at Fort Brooke.

Post Cemetery of Henry Barracks at Cayey.

VENEZUELA: Maracay Cemetery at Maracay, Aragua.

VIRGIN ISLANDS: Post Cemetery of St. Thomas, at Bourne Field, St. Thomas Island.

#### PACIFIC AREA

AUSTRALIA: U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery Ipswich at Brisbane. U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery Rookwood at Sydney.



BONIN ISLANDS: Third, Fourth and Fifth Marine Division Cemeteries on Iwo Jima.

DUTCH NEW GUINEA: Hidden Valley Cemetery.

FIJI ISLANDS: Suva Military Cemetery on Suva Island.

GILBERT ISLANDS: Gate of Heaven Cemetery on Taritari Island,
Makin Atoll.

Long Palm Comptent on Betie Island

Lone Palm Cemetery on Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll.

Sleepy Lagoon Cemetery on Larotai Island, Makin Atoll.

HAWAII: Halawa Naval Cemetery on the Island of Oahu.

Mokapu Cemetery at Kaneohe Naval Air Station on Kaneohe Bay, Island of Oahu.

Nuuana Cemetery, near Honolulu, on Island of Oahu. Schofield Barracks Cemetery at Schofield Barracks, Island of Oahu.

U. S. Army Cemetery at Homelani, Island of Hilo.

U. S. Army Cemetery at Makawao, Island of Maui.

U. S. Army Cemetery at Makaweli on Island of Kauai.

JAPAN: U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery at Yokohama.

KOREA: U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery at Seoul.

MARIANAS ISLANDS: American Cemetery on Tinian Island.
Army Cemetery No. 1 on Saipan Island.
Army, Navy, Marine Cemetery No. 1, at
Asan, Guam.
Army, Navy, Marine Cemetery No. 2, at
Agat, Guam.

Army, Navy, Marine Cemetery No. 3, at Agana, Guam.

Second and Fourth Marine Division Cemeteries on Saipan Island.

MARSHALL ISLAND: Coral Sands Cemetery on Kirinian Island, Eniwetok Atoll.

Ennylabegan Cemetery on Ennylabegan

Island, Kwajelein Atoll.

Ivan Island, Kwajalein Atoll.

Japtan Cemetery on Japtan Island, Eni-

wetok Atoll.

Pegerian Cemetery on Pegerian Island,

Majuro Atoll.

NEW CALEDONIA: U. S. Cemetery No. 1 at Noumea.

NEW GUINEA: U. S. Armed Forces Cemeteries No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, No. 4, No. 5, Finschafen, on the east coast of Huon Peninsula, approximately 50 miles north of Port Moresby.

NEW ZEALAND: Great War Memorial Cemetery at Kaori, Wellington.

Waikumete Cemetery at Waikumete.

PALAU ISLANDS: Pleasant Grove Cemetery on Angaur Island.
U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery, Peleliu.

PHILIPPINE ISLANDS: U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery, Batangas, 40 miles south of Manila in Batangas Province.



U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery, Leyte No. 1, outside the town of Palo, eight miles south of Tacloban, Leyte Island.

U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery, Manila No. 1 and U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery, Manila No 2, both located within the city limits of Manila.

U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery, Santa Barbara, No. 1, 135 miles north of Manila.

RYUKYUS ISLANDS: U. S. Armed Forces Cemeteries of First and Sixth Marine Division, and the 7th, 77th and 96th Infantry Divisions all located on Okinawa.

U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery on Ie Shima.

U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery on the Island Command, on Okinawa.

U. S. Armed Forces Cemetery on Zamani Shima.

SAMOAN ISLANDS: U. S. Naval Cemetery on Tutuila Island.

SALOMON ISLANDS: U. S. Army, Navy, Marine Cemetery on Guadalcanal Island.

WAKE ISLAND: Wake Cemetery, located on Peacock Point.

#### CHINA ZONE

CHINA: American Military Section of Hungjao Road Cemetery, Shanghai.

International Funeral Directors, Shanghai. (This is a columbarium).

Mopanshan Cemetery at Fungwangshan, near Chengtu. New American Military Cemetery at Kunming.

MANCHURIA: American Cemetery of Camp Hoten, located at Mukden.

#### INDIA-BURMA ZONE

INDIA: American Military Cemetery at Barrackpore, 116 miles from Calcutta.

American Military Cemetery at Kalaikunda, 77 miles from Calcutta.



#### APPENDIX IV

# Historical Digest of World War II Cemeteries in the European Theatre

On D-day, June 6, 1944, the dead from the initial landings were buried on the beaches of Normandy. Most of these dead were later disinterred and buried in other cemeteries, principally St. Laurent-Sur-Mer overlooking the English Channel. Some were returned to England. The following thirty-six cemeteries of the European Theatre are not necessarily listed in their order of establishment but in their relation to the progress of the war:

#### Brookwood U. S. Military Cemetery

Located thirty miles southwest of London, England, in a cemetery used largely for British war dead. Interred are 3,364 Americans. Established on July 12, 1942.

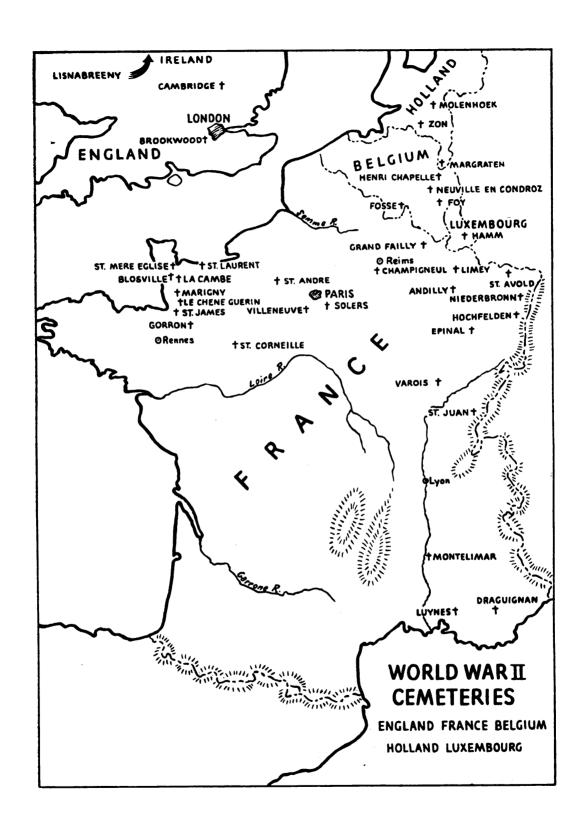
#### Cambridge U. S. Military Cemetery

Established on the second anniversary of Pearl Harbor. Buried here are 5,747 Americans. The natural setting of Madingly Hill, near the ancient and historic city of Cambridge, England, adds a grandeur of beauty and tranquillity to this cemetery.

#### Lisnabreeny U. S. Military Cemetery

In northern Ireland, approximately one mile south of Belfast. Here lie 146 Americans.





#### La Cambe U. S. Military Cemetery

Established two days after D-day by the First Army near the coast of Normandy, twelve miles east of Carentan. Interred are 4,534 Americans.

# Ste Mère Eglise U. S. Military Cemetery

Scene of the 82nd Airborne Division's drop on D-day in Normandy, Ste Mère Eglise is located twenty-five miles south of Cherbourg. Here, in the hedgerow country, lie the remains of 4,800 Americans, men who led the invasion of Europe with parachutes and gliders. Established eighteen days after the assault on Normandy.

# St. Laurent-Sur-Mer U. S. Military Cemetery

Here lie 3,797 Americans who died on the beaches of France. Opened by the First Army on June 29, 1944, this cemetery lies in a natural setting overlooking the English Channel.

# Blosville U. S. Military Cemetery

Buried here are 5,364 Americans. This cemetery, located twenty-eight miles south of Cherbourg, was opened by the 607th Graves Registration Company on July 6, 1944.

#### Gorron U. S. Military Cemetery

Established by the 603rd Graves Registration Company, eighteen miles northwest of Mayenne, France, on July 30. Interred are 753 Americans of the First Army.

#### Marigny U. S. Military Cemetery

Situated ten miles west of St. Lô, Marigny was opened on July 31 by the First Army. Buried here are 3,044 Americans.



#### St. James U. S. Military Cemetery

Located between Normandy and Brittany, St. James is a beautiful site surrounded by woods and shrubs. Here lie 4,085 Americans, victims of the Breakthrough at Avranches and its subsequent exploitation by the Third Army. Established August 5, 1944, just after the terrible drive out of Normandy.

#### Le Chene-Guerin U. S. Military Cemetery

Established on August 7, fifteen miles east of St. Lô by the First Army. Buried are 1,202 Americans.

#### St. Corneille U.S. Military Cemetery

A Third Army cemetery located eight miles west of Le Mans, France. Interred are 521 Americans and 41 Allies. Opened August 16.

# Draguignan U. S. Military Cemetery

Near the scene of the Seventh Army's Operation ANVIL, Draguignan lies thirty-two miles northeast of Cannes. Interred in the Riviera countryside are 922 Americans with 105 Allies. Established on August 19.

#### St. Andre U. S. Military Cemetery

Ten miles southeast of Evreux, between Paris and Caen. Established by the First Army on August 24. Interred are 1,842 Americans.

# Villeneuve-Sur-Auvers U. S. Military Cemetery

Established in the wake of Third Army's liberation of Paris and the crossing of the Seine River, this cemetery is a verdant



tribute to the 534 Americans who lie buried here. Opened in late August, 1944, this is one of the smaller cemeteries in France.

#### Solers U. S. Military Cemetery

Just eighteen miles from Paris lies Solers, resting place of 1,616 Americans and 18 Allies. Established by the First Army on August 30, following the liberation of Paris.

#### Champigneul U. S. Military Cemetery

Another Third Army cemetery, located fifteen miles south of Reims, where 1,504 Americans and 99 Allies are buried. Opened September 1.

#### Montelimar U. S. Military Cemetery

A Seventh Army cemetery in the Rhone Valley near Valence, France. Opened September 2. Buried here are 153 Americans.

#### Fosse U. S. Military Cemetery

This is the first cemetery to open on Belgian soil. Established near Namur by the First Army on September 8, just after American troops entered Belgium. Interred are 2,200 Americans and 96 Allies.

#### Andilly U.S. Military Cemetery

Located forty-two miles southeast of Metz in Third Army territory. Established September 12 in the picturesque French hills around Nancy. Interred are 3,424 Americans and 195 Allies.



#### Zon U. S. Military Cemetery

First American cemetery to be opened in Holland. Established September 19 by the 605th Graves Registration Company, after the 101st Airborne Division made its surprising drop near Eindhoven. Buried here are 416 Americans and 48 Allies.

#### Molenhoek U. S. Military Cemetery

Located six miles south of Nijmegen, Holland, this cemetery was opened on September 20, 1944, by the 605th Graves Registration Company when Allied Airborne troops established the famous bridgehead at Nijmegen. Here lie 795 Americans and 41 Allies.

#### Henri Chapelle U. S. Military Cemetery

The second largest cemetery of World War II, located midway between Aachen and Liège. Established by the First Army on September 25. Interred are 17,323 Americans and 191 Allies. Until reburials began at Margraten, Henri Chapelle was the largest cemetery in Europe. It is located on a high plateau, overlooking the beautiful Ardennes. The 607th Graves Registration Company was largely responsible for the work at this cemetery.

# Luynes U. S. Military Cemetery

A Seventh Army Cemetery near Marseille, where 785 Americans are buried. It was opened on October 4.

# Epinal U. S. Military Cemetery

The largest cemetery opened by the Seventh Army in its sweep through southern France. Established on October 6, this



site contains the bodies of 7,720 Americans. Located on a small plain where the fighting was the hardest for the Seventh Army, Epinal bears mute testimony to the bitterness of the Vosges campaign.

#### Limey U. S. Military Cemetery

Established by Third Army on November 6, near Saar-brucken, the scene of one of the great struggles of the war. Buried here are 6,012 Americans who fought under General Patton at Metz.

# Margraten U.S. Military Cemetery

Located in Limburg Province, Holland, Margraten is the largest temporary cemetery of World War II. Here are buried 17,742 Americans and 1,026 Allies. All of these graves have been adopted by the Dutch people, through the work of a small committee organized under the direction of the 611th Graves Registration Company, the unit that opened and operated the cemetery for nine months. Established November 10.

# Varois U.S. Military Cemetery

Located five miles from Dijon, France, this cemetery contains the remains of 168 Americans and 100 Allies. Opened by the Seventh Army on November 18.

#### St. Juan U. S. Military Cemetery

Another Seventh Army cemetery, located fifteen miles east of Besancon, France. Buried here are 944 Americans. Opened in November, 1944.



#### Hochfelden U. S. Military Cemetery

Opened by the First Army near Strasbourg, on December 12. Interred are 1,093 Americans and 12 Allies.

#### Neiderbronn U.S. Military Cemetery

Another First Army cemetery located near Strasbourg. Here lie 588 Americans. Opened on December 18.

# Grand Failly U.S. Military Cemetery

Located northeast of Verdun, this cemetery holds 2,957 Americans and 143 Allies. Opened by the Third Army on December 24.

#### Hamm U. S. Military Cemetery

Here, in the only Luxembourg cemetery established by the Third Army, lies its beloved commander, Lt. General George S. Patton, Jr. Opened on December 29, 1944, as the Allies fought back the German armies surging into the Ardennes. Buried are 12,300 Americans and Allies, a large number of whom were the defenders of Bastogne.

#### Neuville-En-Condroz U. S. Military Cemetery

Here lie 937 Americans who fell in the Battle of the Bulge. Opened by the First Army soon after the Ardennes counteroffensive in Belgium.

#### Foy U. S. Military Cemetery

Opened by the Third Army on February 4, 1945, to take care of the remaining Americans who fell in the Battle of the Bulge. Located four miles southeast of Bastogne. Buried are 2,700 Americans and 26 Allies.



#### St. Avold U. S. Military Cemetery

One of the last cemeteries to open in Europe, it is located near the highway between Metz and Strasbourg. Established on March 16. Buried here are 4,221 Americans and four Allies.

#### Allied and Enemy Dead

It may be noted that there is no reference made to enemy dead in the above cemeteries. German dead were buried within the confines of the U. S. military cemeteries established in Europe but were segregated in separate fields or sections, usually at least one hundred yards from the Americans and Allies. The Allies buried their own dead by establishing cemeteries much more frequently than the Americans. It was an American policy, however, to inter Allied dead whenever it was impossible to transport the remains to a nearby Allied cemetery or where such a cemetery was absent.



#### APPENDIX V

The following information was released through Margraten Cemetery Headquarters, August 19, 1946:

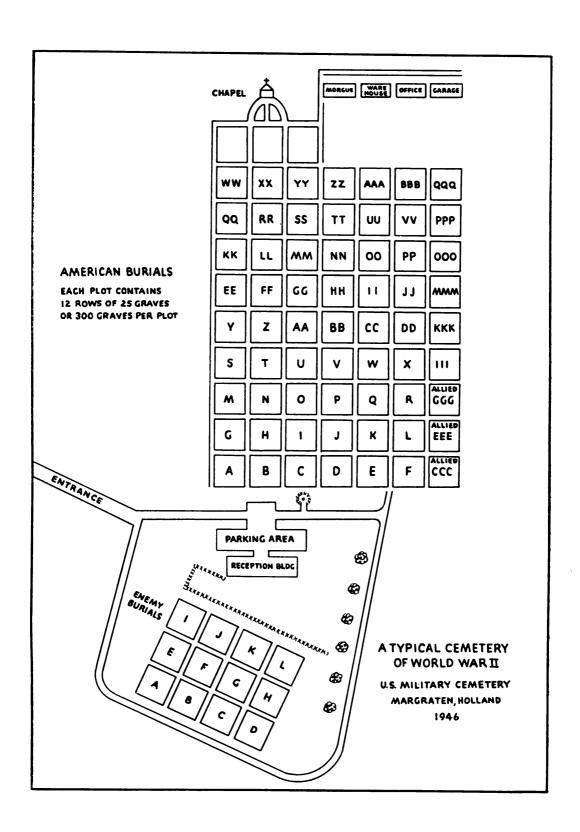
#### U. S. MILITARY CEMETERY, MARGRATEN, HOLLAND

- 1. Superintendent: Johannese M. O. Straarup, U. S. War Department Civilian.
- 2. Number of Americans buried: 17,738, most of them from the Ninth Army, 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, and the U. S. Air Force.
- 3. Number of Allied buried: 1,026.
- 4. Number of Germans buried: 3,075.
- 5. Acreage: approximately 47 acres.
- 6. Acreage of Allied plots: American Cemetery, 36 acres, including one and one-half acres in Allied plots and area around information building.
- 7. Acreage of German cemetery: 10 acres; 1 acre of road from main entrance to cemetery.
- 8. Established by: the 611th Q. M. Graves Registration Co. and the 3136th Q. M. Service Co. of the Ninth Army. Other companies have had charge of the cemetery, but no information is available at the cemetery as to their dates, names, and numbers.

# American Cemetery

1. Date of opening: first burial, November 10, 1944. Margraten U. S. Military Cemetery, named after the town of the same name in Limburg Province, is located five miles east of





Maastricht, Holland. The 17,738 American and 1,026 Allied graves have all been adopted by the Dutch people; at all times there are flowers on the graves, placed there as a symbol of gratitude to the men who gave their lives that Holland might again be free. Among those buried at Margraten is Major General Maurice Rose, 0-8439, Commanding General of the 3rd Armored Division, killed in action March 30, 1945.

- 2. Date of closing: March 30, 1946, when the last burial took place.
- 3. Number of plots: 59.
- 4. Number of unknowns: 955.
- 5. Number of plots partially filled: none.
- 6. Number of common graves (mass burials): 15.
- 7. Memorial Day Service, 1946: This Service was held on May 30, 1946, by the U. S. F. E. T. Headquarters, General Joseph T. McNarney giving the principal address. Prince Bernhard, the American Ambassador to Holland, Mr. Hornbech, as well as burgomasters, Dutch officials, and clergymen of all faiths were present. Units of the American and Dutch Army, each with a band, were there, as well as between forty and forty-five thousand people from South Limburg.
- 8. Memorial Day Service, 1945: This service was held on May 30, 1945, by the Ninth Army. General Simpson, Commanding General of the Ninth Army, was the principal speaker. Burgomasters of the nearby communities, Dutch government officials, ranking military leaders of Allied nations, Allied military units, and chaplains and clergymen of all faiths participated.
- 9. Number of adoptions: all graves.



#### Allied Plots

- 1. Date of opening: first burial November 20, 1944.
- 2. Date of closing: last burial, September 23, 1945; actual closing on same day as American plots.
- 3. Number of plots: 4.
- 4. Number of unknowns: 155.
- 5. Number of plots partially filled: 1.
- 6. Number of adoptions: all graves.
- 7. Nationalities represented: Italian, Russian, Czechoslovakian, British, Dutch, French, Greek, Polish, Yugoslavian, Belgian, Canadian.

#### German Cemetery

- 1. Date of opening: November 14, 1944.
- 2. Date of closing: last burial August 2, 1946.
- 3. Number of plots: 11.
- 4. Number of plots partially filled: 1.
- 5. Number of unknowns: 2,776.
- 6. Number known by name: 299.
- 7. Number of adoptions: none.

#### APPENDIX VI

Breakdown of a Quartermaster Graves Registration Company according to Tables of Organization and Equipment 10-297 — C-2, War Department, 22 December 1944:

# Company Headquarters

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# Company Commander

(Captain)

**Executive Officer** 

(1st Lieutenant)

First sergeant

Technical sergeant

Staff sergeant Staff sergeant

Technician 4th grade

Technician 4th grade

Technician 4th grade

Corporal
Technician 5th grad

Technician 5th grade Technician 5th grade

Private first class

Private first class

Private first class

#### **Duties**

Commanding Officer and graves

registration officer

Civil engineer and graves regis-

tration officer

Executive non - commissioned

officer

Topographic draftsman

Supply sergeant Mess sergeant

Graves registration clerk

Motor mechanic

Chief cook

Company clerk Truck driver

Second cook

Light truck driver

Bugler and messenger

Assistant cook



#### **APPENDIX**

Private first class

Assistant cook

Privates (5 basics)

Laborers

Total officer strength — 2

Total enlisted strength — 19

Platoon

Unit (Platoon headquarters)

**Duties** 

1st Lieutenant

Platoon commander and graves

registration officer

Staff sergeant

Platoon sergeant

Technician 5th grade

Topographic draftsman Graves registration clerk

Technician 5th grade Unit (Section)

**Duties** 

Sergeant

Section leader

Privates first class (3)

Basics — clerks, drivers, etc.

Privates (12)

Laborers

Unit (Medical section)

Duties

Staff sergeant

Chief of medical section

Sergeants (2)

Examination of deceased, removal of personal effects, initiation of medical reports

Total per platoon — 1 officer, 22 enlisted men.

Summary

Three sections in each platoon; four platoons in Company.

One medical section in each platoon; four in Company.

Aggregate strength: 6 officers, 107 quartermaster enlisted men,

12 medical enlisted men.

Total strength of Company: 125.

# TWO WEEK SOOK

